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Cosmic Web

Hemsterhuis Among the German Romantics

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(*Laure Cahen-Maurel & Giulia Valpione*)

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Editorial: Philosophical Orb

This latest issue of *Symphilosophie* is doubly commemorative. On the one hand, it presents new research on François Hemsterhuis, an important yet neglected Dutch philosopher. The year 2021 marked the tercentenary of Hemsterhuis's birth. On the other hand, it celebrates Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis). This year 2022 registers the 250th anniversary of their births: Schlegel was born 10 March 1772, Hardenberg 2 May 1772.

The importance of the friendship between Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis for the emergence of early German romanticism is well-known. But what is often overlooked is that before they “Fichticized” together they already shared a crucial interest in Hemsterhuis. Friedrich Schlegel has recounted their first meeting at the University of Leipzig in 1792. In a letter to his brother, he writes as though the fates of Greek mythology, who spin the destinies of human beings, had played a part in this encounter:

Fate has placed into my hands a young man who is capable of everything. [...] The study of philosophy has given him the wonderful ability to fashion beautiful philosophical thoughts. He does not aim at the true, but at the beautiful. His favorite writers are Plato and Hemsterhuis. On one of the first evenings he ardently expressed his view to me that there is no evil in the world – and that everything is again approaching the Golden Age.¹

It is therefore under the auspices of Hemsterhuis, the “Dutch Plato” as he was called by his contemporaries, that Friedrich Schlegel became acquainted with the person who would later adopt the pseudonym “Novalis.” The name *novalis* literally means in Latin fallow earth or unploughed land, *and* it echoes the idea of a new star in the heavens – a stellar explosion (*nova*). We will see that this connection between the earth and heavens, or rather, the amplitude of the adopted name and the exploration of unknown territories, is due in part to Hemsterhuis's philosophy.

The consecutive commemorations of the births of Hemsterhuis, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, are an opportunity to revisit a key area of romantic philosophy that is still rather unknown. This is surprising, because

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel, January 1792, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (henceforth: KFSa), eds. Ernst Behler *et al.* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987), vol. 23, p. 41. Cf. Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (henceforth: HKA), eds. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998), vol. 4, pp. 571-572.

like with his compatriot Spinoza before him, Hemsterhuis's influence on his contemporaries was widespread and profound, especially in Germany.

The main thematic dossier of this issue has been put together by Daniel Whistler, Professor of Philosophy at Royal Holloway (University of London). Author of the brand-new monograph, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*², whose aim is to reintegrate Hemsterhuis into the canon of modern thought, Daniel Whistler has also edited (in collaboration with Jacob van Sluis) the first ever English edition of Hemsterhuis's philosophical writings: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*. Two volumes of this three-volume edition were published at the beginning of this year and the third is in press.³

Daniel Whistler's introduction to the main dossier is a genuine essay in its own right. It includes intellectual vignettes of each of the figures who played a role in the reception of Hemsterhuis's work in Germany as well as a presentation of Hemsterhuis alongside the German romantics. A historical sketch of this kind has never been carried out in English before. The main dossier consists of seven new research articles. We believe the introduction and these seven articles will have a considerable impact on both Hemsterhuisian and romantic scholarship. Our deepest thanks go to Daniel Whistler, Kirill Chepurin, Viviana Galletta, Jocelyn Holland, Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña, and Gabriel Trop, for all their remarkable work.

★

This fourth issue of *Symphilosophie* is titled "Cosmic Web." The image of a web plays a fundamental role in Hemsterhuis's metaphysics. In the opening pages of the first of his four great Socratic dialogues, *Sophylus, or on Philosophy* (1778), Hemsterhuis explicitly deploys the example of a spider web to define the essence and task of philosophy itself.⁴ Philosophy's mission is to reveal

² Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

³ See Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis (eds.), *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773*, with introductions by Peter Sonderren, Jacob van Sluis and Gabriel Trop (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022); et *idem* (eds.), *The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787*, with introductions by Daniel Whistler and Laure Cahen-Maurel (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022). The third volume will be published shortly: *Philosophical Correspondence and Fragments*. It includes introductions by Claudia Melica, Henri A. Krop, Peter Sonderren, and Jonathan I. Israel.

⁴ Arif Yildiz has also recently translated this dialogue of Hemsterhuis into Turkish. See: François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ya da Felsefe Üzerine*, trans. Arif Yildiz, *ViraVerita E-Journal: Interdisciplinary Encounters* 15 (2022): 292-320.

“unknown lands of an immense size”, and in this way to make “the universe and ourselves richer.”⁵ Philosophy’s method of carrying out this exploration may be compared to the work of the spider. To weave its web, the spider first creates a circular frame from which rays emanate to give the whole a structure. This construction, which proceeds outwards from the center, allows the spider to move around its web in concentric orbs. Circles are continually added in order to better trap its prey. Similarly, philosophy for Hemsterhuis creates a form in movement. It is a sphere whose center is none other than we ourselves as thinking subjects. The framework of this orb is the profusion of possible paths of thought and the exercise of all our organs, allowing us to traverse ascending and descending layers of experience, to acquire an ever-greater wealth of knowledge.

However, in order to constitute the basis of a veritable philosophical quest and to attain “the remotest truths”⁶ – like astronomical knowledge – the exercise of our own reflexivity must be freed of all prejudices, pre-established systems of thought, traditions, and abstract erudition. Like the spider secreting the silky web from its own glands so that it is able to extend its web up to lofty treetops and even across rivers, it is up to us to enter into ourselves, to follow the path of common sense to elevate ourselves and encircle the earth and the heavens. From the domain of the senses to that of the spirit; from inert matter and the mechanical movement that governs it, to the spontaneous active force of our free will and moral ends. In the same way that a spider’s web hardly possesses any weight compared to the captured prey but still holds it without breaking, the thread of our common sense may appear to be highly tenuous philosophically speaking, yet it nevertheless leads to discoveries of an unimaginable magnitude. “By this means” – declares Euthyphro in *Sophylus*, who is an avatar of Socrates – “we will go on to traverse the universe without danger. The thread of good sense cannot be broken.”⁷

This journey through the universe and the imperative call to a reflexive return into ourselves can be found in one of the most famous fragments of the entire romantic corpus, fragment 16 of *Pollen*. “We dream of journeys through the universe: but is the universe not already within us? We are ignorant of the depths of our spirit,” writes Novalis in this fragment, which poetically formulates the celebrated romantic motif: “the mysterious path

⁵ François Hemsterhuis, *Sophylus, or on Philosophy*, in: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, vol. 2, p. 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

leads within.”⁸ Yet the romantic philosopher also reminds us that we should not stay at this inner universe, there is the necessity of going out into the world again: “The second step must be an effective external look, a sustained and independent observation of the external world.”⁹ In other words, for Novalis, the outer macrocosm and the inner microcosm reciprocally overlap and complement each other.

To be sure, Hemsterhuis’s notion of common sense is less prevalent in romantic philosophy, whose guiding thread is rather, for Novalis at least, the productive or creative imagination. Just like in Kantian and Fichtean transcendental idealism, the romantic *Einbildungskraft* should not to be confused with mere fantasy. The creative imagination is a faculty of connection or synthesis *par excellence*, whose regulated activity forms the hinges as it were that weld the real and the ideal. In this sense, romantic philosophy has the same goal as Hemsterhuis’s metaphysics: to traverse the universe in all the complexity and richness of its empirical manifestations.

This proximity with Hemsterhuis even plays itself out at the level of form. The singular style of romantic philosophy is well-known: it frequently appears an asystematic thought, consisting of scattered fragments devoid of center or unity. Yet at times it aims to weave an interconnected network as subtle as that of a spider’s web. Via the thread of the creative imagination, it philosophically strives to encompass distant elements and separate modes of knowledge. And like the spider’s construction, to interweave them in a way that is not at all random. The resulting whole is certainly fine, but at the same time extremely elastic and solid. As Novalis writes, it should be unlike “Penelope’s woven fabric”, which always had to be restarted again the next day.¹⁰

Here it should be recalled that the romantics expressly attribute to Hemsterhuis the philosophical inspiration for the idea of a “total science” – an idea underpinning for instance Novalis’s encyclopaedia project: “ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. We owe the most sublime truths of our day to contact with the long-separated elements of the total-science. Hemsterhuis.”¹¹

⁸ Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, fragment 16, HKA 2, 417-419: “Nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, fragment 24, HKA 2, 423. This double inward and outward path is often forgotten, even among scholars; see Laure Cahen-Maurel, “Philosophical Paths”, in: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, vol. 2, p. 29.

¹⁰ Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 409, HKA 3, 318; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, trans. D. W. Wood, 64.

¹¹ Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 199, HKA 3, p. 275; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 30.

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The cover artwork of this issue of *Symphilosophie* likewise invokes the important cognitive method of proceeding by interconnections. This detail from a painting of some flowers is by the artist Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1606-1683), a realist painter of the Dutch Golden Age and contemporary of Rembrandt. More precisely, an almost imperceptible element in this painting can arrest our gaze: that of the spider, element of the microcosmic life on earth, starting to spin its translucent and sticky thread, seeking to capture the bee, who is foraging in this silent life and external world of flowers and opulent colors. Using this web, the spider is repeatedly able to descend and ascend again “safely”¹² from the top of the flower bouquet to the bottom of the vase.

The concentric orbs of a completed spider’s web on earth may therefore be viewed as a mirror of the macrocosmic celestial orbs. Our title ‘cosmic web’ reflects these two aspects. Indeed, this expression has a technical meaning in present-day astronomy. The cosmic web designates the distribution of dark and light matter that forms the basis of the universe. Within this web-like structure, galaxies are distributed along a network of thin filaments of hydrogen gas. Voids occur between these filaments. Cosmological models created by scientists have long been able to predict the gas filaments from which galaxies form their first stars. But we had to wait until technical advances in the latest space telescopes to obtain images of the cosmic web and ascertain its empirical existence. We only have to recall the series of spectacular images provided by the Webb telescope that has dethroned Hubble. Revealed to the general public only this year, these images have deepened our understanding of the most distant galaxies.

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As we saw, following the lead of Hemsterhuis, around 1800 romantic philosophy similarly sought to venture into unknown worlds, to pass from terrestrial space to the stars. However, among these unknown lands there is a domain less explored than that of the celestial bodies and sidereal universe: the intriguing Hemsterhuisian conception of the “moral face of the universe”, which presupposes a specific sense or organ to apprehend it – the “moral organ.”

¹² François Hemsterhuis, *Sophylus, or on Philosophy*, p. 46.

A number of the articles in this issue investigate the romantic exploration of the world in its cosmological dimension (Viviana Galletta, Kirill Chepurin), and in its moral dimension in the Hemsterhuisian sense (Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña, and Gabriel Trop). While the central themes of the ‘moral organ’, ‘moral astronomy’, not to mention the ‘elasticity’ of thought (Jocelyn Holland), are all addressed.

These research articles are accompanied by a set of translations carried out by Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis, and James Reid respectively. Daniel Whistler has produced a previously unpublished English translation of excerpts from five letters of Hemsterhuis to his ‘Diotima’ Princess Gallitzin. These letters concern the mythological figure of Prometheus (partly inspired by Goethe’s poem of the same name). Jacob van Sluis, former subject librarian of the University of Groningen, who was responsible for the critical edition of Hemsterhuis’s *Œuvres philosophiques* published by Brill in 2015, has kindly transcribed for us two very early German notices on Hemsterhuis’s *Lettre sur les désirs* and *Lettre sur l’homme et ses rapports* that were published in Frankfurt in 1772. In addition, he and Daniel Whistler have translated these two notices into English. We have furthermore included the original French of Hemsterhuis’s text *Lettre sur les désirs*. The introduction briefly describes the background to Herder’s influential 1781 German translation of it. Finally, the translation dossier ends with James Reid’s first complete translation into English of Novalis’s “Hemsterhuis Studies” (1797). We would like to express our gratitude to Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis, and James Reid: these pieces provide a vibrant illustration of the reception of Hemsterhuis in Germany across three key decades.

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The “Miscellaneous” section celebrates the 250th anniversary of the births of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis with articles by Giovanna Pinna and Jack Haughton. Pinna’s paper sheds new light on a theme relatively neglected in romantic aesthetics studies: the role played by the Kantian sublime in Schlegel’s formulation of the beautiful. While Haughton’s article tackles from a novel avenue the pietistic legacy in Novalis’s conception of the self and his philosophy of religion. Next is a piece that is a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in its own way, an article by Daniel McClennan on the Kleistian reception of Kant’s philosophy. McClennan develops the Kantian concept of actuality and its re-articulation as a problem in Kleist’s work, with quotations from *Das Erdbeben in Chili* and *Penthesilea*. The paper includes several original drawings by the author himself.

The “Miscellaneous” section also contains two new translations of writings by Friedrich Schlegel. Maurizio Malimpensa provides an Italian version of a little-known text – the draft of an intervention envisaged by Friedrich Schlegel (but not published) in the public Atheism Controversy in Germany in 1798-99. In this text Schlegel defends Fichte after the latter was accused of atheism and eventually dismissed from his position at the University of Jena. The second translation is an English rendering by Joseph Carew of an excerpt from the “Introduction” to Friedrich Schlegel’s lectures on *Transcendental Philosophy* which were held at the University of Jena during the winter semester of 1800 / 1801. These lectures are among texts by Friedrich Schlegel for which full translations are still lacking in the English, French, and Italian languages. We warmly thank Joseph Carew for this translated excerpt from his forthcoming edition of the complete text.

This issue of *Symphilosophie* includes two review essays. One by David W. Wood: “Window to Goethe’s Colour Revolution.” It considers the philosophy of polarity in three recent publications on J. W. Goethe and the romantic scientist J. W. Ritter. Wood supports the idea that Goethe’s scientific thought too contains a subterranean engagement with Hemsterhuis’s metaphysics of the cosmos. In order to also celebrate the Novalis-Schlegel anniversary, the second review essay by Laure Cahen-Maurel takes up the notions of “symphilosophy” and encyclopaedism in two commemorative publications, and briefly assesses the present state of the editions of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis.

Five book reviews complete this issue. Three of them – by Luigi Filieri, Alexander Knopf, and Victor Béguin – have already been published as preprints on the journal’s website. The fourth book review is by Anne Pollok, who has reviewed one of the most important editions of 2021, the anthology: *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, published by Oxford University Press, edited by Dalia Nassar and Kristin Gjesdal, with translations by Anna C. Ezekiel.

Here we would like to say that we are extremely pleased to announce that Anne Pollok will be the guest editor of the next issue of *Symphilosophie*. Issue 5 is devoted to the topic of aesthetics in connection with the problem of freedom, particularly artistic practice that works towards the emancipation of women. The call for contributions is open and will close on 31 March, 2023.

Lastly, the fifth book review concerns a publication relating to the 250th anniversary of the births of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, a book that has received a lot of press: the publication, consecutively in English in September and in German in October, of Andrea Wulf’s, *Magnificent Rebels: The First*

Romantics and the Invention of the Self.¹³ Frederick C. Beiser, one of the pioneers of philosophical studies on romanticism has critically reviewed Wulf's book. Among others, he raises the question of the genre to which the book belongs. We are grateful to F. C. Beiser for permitting us to republish his review in German. His text originally appeared in English in November in the online journal *The Marginalia Review of Books*.¹⁴ We thank the journal's editors, Samuel Loncar and Alexandra Barlyski, for allowing us to reprint the review in a German language version. Our gratitude also goes to Erich Fuchs and Levin Zende, who have kindly checked the translation.

In conclusion, we are thankful to all our external reviewers for their precious expertise, and our entire editorial team for their invaluable help. As this issue 4 hopefully shows, in the universe of romantic philosophy there remains much fallow land still to be ploughed.

★

As we finished writing the above words, we received the news of the passing of Dieter Henrich, an eminent figure in the contemporary reception of classical German philosophy. Among his many important contributions, we would especially like to underscore his method of *Konstellationsforschung*.¹⁵ Our knowledge of the philosophical debates and so-called minor figures in the last years of the 18th century, would be poorer without this method. Scholarship on philosophical romanticism is therefore immensely indebted to him. Even this volume, whose title points to real and metaphysical constellations, evokes his work and method of research.

Bonn & Padua, December 2022

Laure Cahen-Maurel
Giulia Valpione

¹³ Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self* (New York: Knopf, 2022); *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2022). This book has also been translated into Spanish and Dutch.

¹⁴ See Frederick C. Beiser, "Inheriting Autonomy: The German Romantics Reconsidered", 11 November 2022, in *The Marginalia Review of Books*: <https://themarginaliareview.com/magnificent-rebels-beiser/>

¹⁵ See Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991).

Editorial: Philosophische Sphäre

Die vorliegende Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* versteht sich als doppelte Festschrift. Zum einen werden darin neue Forschungen über Frans Hemsterhuis gewürdigt, einem eher unbekanntem niederländischen Philosophen, dessen Geburtstag sich 2021 zum 300. Mal jährte. Zum anderen soll daran erinnert werden, dass sowohl Friedrich Schlegel als auch Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) vor 250 Jahren das Licht der Welt erblickten: Ersterer am 10. März 1772, letzterer am 2. Mai.

Es ist bekannt, wie wichtig die Freundschaft zwischen Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis für die Entstehung der Frühromantik gewesen worden ist. Es wird jedoch oft vergessen, dass das Interesse an Hemsterhuis bereits vor ihrem gemeinsamen „Fichtisieren“ von entscheidender Bedeutung war. Als Friedrich Schlegel seinem Bruder davon berichtete, wie er Novalis 1792 an der Universität Leipzig kennenlernte, schrieb er, als hätten die Parzen der griechischen Mythologie, die die Schicksale der Menschen spinnen, bei dieser Begegnung eine Rolle gespielt:

Das Schicksal hat einen jungen Mann in meine Hand gegeben, aus dem Alles werden kann. – Das Studium der Philosophie hat ihm üppige Leichtigkeit gegeben, schöne philosophische Gedanken zu bilden – er geht nicht auf das Wahre sondern auf das Schöne – seine Lieblingsschriftsteller sind Plato und Hemsterhuys – mit wildem Feuer trug er mir einen der ersten Abende seine Meinung vor – es sey gar nichts Böses in der Welt – und alles nahe sich wieder dem goldenen Zeitalter.¹

Im Zeichen Hemsterhuis, des „batavischen Plato“, wie er von seinen Zeitgenossen genannt wurde, lernte Friedrich Schlegel also den Mann kennen, der bald unter seinem Künstlernamen „Novalis“ bekannt werden sollte. *Novalis* bedeutet wörtlich (auf Lateinisch) brachliegendes Land, das es zu erschließen gilt. Das Wort spiegelt auch die Idee eines neuen Sterns wider – genauer gesagt: einer Sternexplosion (*nova*). Wir werden später sehen, inwiefern die Verbindung zwischen Erde und Himmel, die Erkundung noch unbekannter Gebiete, kurz: der Bedeutungsradius dieses Pseudonyms (zum Teil) Hemsterhuis zu verdanken ist.

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, Brief an August Wilhelm Schlegel vom Januar 1792. In: *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (KFSa). Hg. Ernst Behler *et al.* Bd. 23. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1987, S. 41. Vgl. Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (HKA). Hg. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl und Gerhard Schulz. Bd. 4. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1998, S. 571-572.

Die aufeinanderfolgenden Jubiläen zum 300. Geburtstag von Hemsterhuis und zum 250. Geburtstag von Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis sind für uns eine Gelegenheit, einen Zugang zu einem Aspekt der romantischen Philosophie zu eröffnen, der, als Folge der Vernachlässigung einer Besprechung von Hemsterhuis und seinem Werk, heute größtenteils unbeachtet bleibt. Daniel Whistler, Professor für Philosophie am Royal Holloway (University of London), hat das thematische Dossier dieser Ausgabe zusammengestellt. Er ist Autor der brandneuen Monographie *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*², die Hemsterhuis wieder in den Kanon der modernen Philosophie einzugliedern sucht. Daniel Whistler hat in Zusammenarbeit mit Jacob van Sluis die erste englische Ausgabe von Hemsterhuis' philosophischem Werk, *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis* herausgegeben, von der Anfang des Jahres zwei der drei geplanten Bände erschienen sind. Der dritte Band ist im Druck.³

Seine Einleitung zum Dossier stellt sich als selbstständiger Aufsatz dar, in dem jede Figur, die bei der Rezeption von Hemsterhuis' Werk in Deutschland eine Rolle gespielt hat, behandelt wird. Hemsterhuis' Stellung „an der Seite“ der deutschen Romantiker wird darin neu überdacht. Ein solch umfangreicher Abriss liegt in englischer Sprache bisher noch nicht vor. Darüber hinaus enthält das Dossier die Ergebnisse bisher unveröffentlichter Forschungsarbeiten, die unserer Meinung nach sowohl auf die Hemsterhuis- als auch auf die Romantik-Forschung einen erheblichen Einfluss haben dürften. Wir möchten insbesondere Daniel Whistler sowie allen, die zum Dossier beigetragen haben, Kirill Chepurin, Viviana Galletta, Jocelyn Holland, Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña und Gabriel Trop, unseren tief empfundenen Dank für die Durchführung dieser bewundernswerten Arbeit aussprechen.

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² Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

³ Vgl. Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis (eds.), *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773*, with introductions by Peter Sonderer, Jacob van Sluis and Gabriel Trop. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Und *idem* (eds.), *The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787*, with introductions by Daniel Whistler and Laure Cahen-Maurel. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Der dritte Band wird in Kürze unter dem Titel *Philosophische Korrespondenz und Fragmente* erscheinen. Er enthält Einführungen von Claudia Melica, Henri A. Krop, Peter Sonderer und Jonathan I. Israel.

Diese vierte Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* trägt den Titel „Kosmisches Netz“. Das Bild des Netzes spielt bei Hemsterhuis eine zentrale Rolle. In der Einleitung des ersten seiner vier großen sokratischen Dialoge, *Sophylus oder Über die Philosophie* (1778), verwendet Hemsterhuis explizit das Beispiel eines Spinnennetzes, um das Wesen und die Aufgabe der Philosophie zu definieren.⁴ Die Philosophie hat die Aufgabe, „unbekanntes Land von unermesslicher Ausdehnung sichtbar“ und dadurch „das Universum und uns selbst reicher“ zu machen. Die Art und Weise, wie sie diese Erkundung durchführt, wird mit dem Werk einer Spinne verglichen. Die Spinne, die ihr Netz webt, zeichnet zunächst einen kreisförmigen Rahmen mit einem Zentrum, von dem Strahlen ausgehen, die dem Ganzen ein Gerüst verleihen. Diese Konstruktion ermöglicht es ihr dann, das Netz in konzentrischen Kreisen zu durchlaufen, die nach und nach hinzugefügt werden, um die Fangfalle zu schließen. In ähnlicher Weise zeichnet die Philosophie für Hemsterhuis eine Form, die sich in Bewegung befindet. Einen Kreis, deren Zentrum niemand anders ist als wir selbst, denkende Subjekte; und das Gerüst, die Fülle der möglichen Wege unseres Denkens sowie die Ausübung aller unserer Organe, die es uns ermöglichen, wachsende und aufsteigende Schichten der Erfahrung zu durchlaufen und einen immer größeren Reichtum an Wissen zu erwerben.

Um die Grundlage für eine wahrhaft philosophische Suche zu bilden und die „entferntesten Wahrheiten“ – wie etwa astronomisches Wissen – zu erreichen, muss die Ausübung unserer eigenen Reflexivität jedoch frei von Vorurteilen, vorgefertigten Denksystemen, Traditionen und gelehrtem Wissen sein. Wie die Spinne, die aus ihren eigenen Drüsen die Seide absondert, aus der die Fäden ihres Netzes bestehen, und die in der Lage ist, ihre Fäden bis in die Baumkronen zu spannen und dadurch Flüsse zu überqueren, müssen wir in uns gehen und unserem gesunden Menschenverstand folgen, um uns von der Erde in den Himmel zu erheben. Von der Ebene der Sinne zur Ebene des Geistes. Von der trägen Materie und der mechanischen Bewegung, die sie regelt, zur spontanen Aktionskraft unseres freien Willens und zu moralischen Zwecken. Und so wie ein Spinnennetz im Vergleich zu den Beutetieren, die es einfängt, wenig Gewicht hat, sie aber dennoch festhält, ohne zu zerreißen, so mag der rote Faden des gesunden Menschenverstandes philosophisch gesehen sehr dünn erscheinen, aber er führt dennoch zu Entdeckungen von ungeahnter Tragweite. Der Euthyphron des *Sophylus*, ein Avatar des Sokrates, erklärt: „Auf diese Weise werden wir

⁴ Arif Yildiz hat diesen Dialog von Hemsterhuis kürzlich auch ins Türkische übersetzt. Siehe: François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ya da Felsefe Üzerine*. Übersetzung von Arif Yildiz. In: *Vira Verita E-Journal: Interdisziplinäre Begegnungen* 15 (2022), 292-320.

das Universum gefahrlos durchqueren. Der Faden des gesunden Menschenverstandes kann nicht abreißen.“

Das Echo der Reise durch das Universum und das Echo des zwingenden Aufrufs zur reflexiven Selbstbesinnung findet sich in einem der berühmtesten Fragmente des gesamten romantischen Korpus, Fragment 16 von *Blüthenstaub*. „Wir träumen von Reisen durch das Weltall: ist denn das Weltall nicht in uns? Die Tiefen unsers Geistes kennen wir nicht“, schreibt Novalis in diesem Fragment, das auf poetische Weise das berühmte Motiv des romantischen Weges formuliert, jenes „geheimnisvollen Weges“, der „nach Innen geht“.⁵ Doch der romantische Philosoph erinnert uns auch daran, dass wir nicht in diesem inneren Universum stehen bleiben sollten, sondern dass ein zweiter Schritt „nach Außen“, eine „gehaltene Beobachtung der Außenwelt“, notwendig sei.⁶ Mit anderen Worten: Für Novalis sind der äußere Makrokosmos und der innere Mikrokosmos deckungsgleich und ergänzen sich wechselseitig.

Zwar hat der gesunde Menschenverstand, von dem Hemsterhuis spricht, zweifellos weniger Bedeutung in der romantischen Philosophie, als deren roten Faden man – zumindest bei Novalis – eher die schöpferische Einbildungskraft ansehen kann. Als Einbildungskraft ist hier wohlgemerkt nicht die Phantasie, sondern die Einbildungskraft des Kantischen und Fichteschen transzendentalen Idealismus zu verstehen, die verbindende oder synthetisierende Fähigkeit schlechthin, deren geregelte Tätigkeit sich an der Scharnierstelle zwischen dem Realen und dem Idealen befindet. In diesem Sinne hat die romantische Philosophie das gleiche Ziel wie Hemsterhuis' Metaphysik: das Universum in seiner ganzen Komplexität, seinem Reichtum und der empirischen oder realen Tiefe seiner Manifestationen zu durchwandern.

Die Nähe zu Hemsterhuis spielt sich sogar auf der Ebene der Form ab. Bekanntlich ist die romantische Philosophie von einer eigenartigen Beschaffenheit. Sie hat den Anschein eines asystematischen Denkens, das aus verstreuten Fragmenten ohne Zentrum und Einheit besteht. Dabei zielt sie jedoch in Wirklichkeit darauf ab, ein Netz von Verbindungen zu knüpfen, die so subtil sind wie die Fäden eines Spinnennetzes. Anhand des Fadens der schöpferischen Einbildungskraft strebt sie philosophisch danach, getrennte Wissensarten und entfernte Elemente zu umfassen; und diese Verbindungen, so ist man hier versucht zu argumentieren, sind so wenig zufällig geknüpft

⁵ Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, Fragment 16, HKA 2, S. 417-419.

⁶ Ebd., Fragment 24, HKA 2, S. 423. Dieser doppelte Weg nach innen und nach außen wird oft vergessen; siehe Laure Cahen-Maurel, „Philosophical Paths“. In: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, Bd. 2, S. 29.

wie es das Weben der Spinne ist. Das so entstandene Ganze ist zwar fein, aber gleichzeitig äußerst fest und elastisch. Und nicht, wie Novalis schreibt, ein „zerreißbares Gewebe“ oder „ein Gewebe der Penelope“, d. h. eine endlose Arbeit, die immer wieder neu begonnen werden muss.⁷ Auf jeden Fall wird man sich daran erinnern, dass Novalis Hemsterhuis ausdrücklich die philosophische Inspiration für die Idee einer „totalen Wissenschaft“ zuschreibt, eine Idee, die den Konsistenzplan seines Projekts einer Enzyklopädie, des sogenannten *Allgemeinen Brouillons*, sichert: „ENZYKLOPAEDISTIK. Die größten Wahrheiten unsrer Tage verdanken wir dem Contact der lange getrennten Glieder der Totalwissenschaft. Hemsterhuis.“⁸

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Das Titelbild dieser Ausgabe trägt zur Veranschaulichung der Bedeutung des Spinnennetzes bei: einerseits, um die Methode des Denkens in Verbindungen zu beleuchten, andererseits, um auf die Bedeutung der Kreisfigur (die konzentrischen Kreise der Spinne auf der Erde, die von einem Himmelskörper beschriebene Bahn) hinzuweisen. Das Titelbild ist ein Blumenbild von Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1606-1683), einem realistischen Maler des niederländischen Goldenen Zeitalters und Zeitgenossen Rembrandts. Genauer gesagt bildet es ein Detail dieses Gemäldes ab, das den Blick anhält: das Detail der Spinne, ein Element des mikrokosmischen Lebens auf der Erde, die hier anfängt, ihre durchscheinende, klebrige Seide zu spinnen, um inmitten dieses stillen Lebens der Außenwelt aus Blumen und opulenten Farben die sammelnde Biene einzufangen. An diesem Faden steigt auch die Spinne immer noch „sicher“ von der Spitze des Straußes zum Fuß der Vase hinab und wieder hinauf.

Die konzentrischen Kreise eines vollendeten Spinnennetzes auf der Erde können daher als ein Spiegel der makrokosmischen Himmelskugeln betrachtet werden. Unser Titel „kosmisches Netz“ spiegelt diese beiden Aspekte wider. Der Ausdruck hat nämlich eine technische Bedeutung in der Astronomie, wo er die Verteilung der dunklen und hellen Materie bezeichnet, die die Grundlage des Universums bildet. In dieser netzartigen Struktur sind die Galaxien entlang eines Netzes von Filamenten aus sehr dünnem Wasserstoffgas verteilt. Zwischen diesen Filamenten befinden sich Hohlräume. Die kosmologischen Modelle der Wissenschaftler konnten die Gasfilamente, in denen die Galaxien ihre ersten Sterne bilden, schon lange vorhersagen. Aber

⁷ Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, Frag. 409, HKA 3, S. 318.

⁸ Ebd., Frag. 199, HKA 3, S. 275.

erst die jüngsten technischen Errungenschaften der neuesten Weltraumteleskope ermöglichten es, Bilder des kosmischen Netzes zu erhalten und es empirisch zu beobachten. Man muss dabei nur an die spektakulären Bilder des Webb-Teleskops, das Hubble den Rang abgelaufen hat, denken. Diese Bilder, die dieses Jahr der breiten Öffentlichkeit zugänglich gemacht wurden, erneuern unseren Blick auf das ferne Universum.

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Wie wir gesehen haben, wollte die romantische Philosophie um 1800 nach dem Vorbild von Hemsterhuis ebenfalls in diese unbekanntem Welten vordringen. Vom Brachland der Erde zu den Sternen und Galaxien. Und unter diesen unbekanntem Ländern gibt es ein Gebiet, das noch weniger erforscht ist als die Beobachtung und Erforschung der Himmelskörper und des siderischen Universums: Hemsterhuis' rätselhafte Vorstellung von einer „moralischen Seite des Universums“, die zu ihrer Erfassung einen Sinn mit einem spezifischen, nämlich „moralischem“ Organ, voraussetzt.

In mehreren Beiträgen dieser Ausgabe wird die romantische Erforschung der Welt sowohl in ihrer kosmologischen (Viviana Galletta, Kirill Chepurin) als auch in ihrer moralischen Dimension im Hemsterhuischen Sinne (Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña und Gabriel Trop) dargestellt. Die zentralen Themen des „moralischen Organs“, einer „moralischen Astronomie“ oder der „Elastizität“ des Denkens (Jocelyn Holland) werden behandelt.

Das Dossier wird von einer Reihe von Übersetzungen begleitet, zu denen Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis und James Reid beigetragen haben. Daniel Whistler stellt hier eine unveröffentlichte englische Übersetzung von Auszügen aus fünf Briefen von Hemsterhuis an seine Diotima, Fürstin Gallitzin, über die mythologische Figur des Prometheus (zum Teil von Goethes gleichnamigem Gedicht inspiriert) zur Verfügung. Jacob van Sluis, ehemaliger Kurator an der Bibliothek der Universität Groningen, dem wir die 2015 bei Brill erschienene kritische Ausgabe von Hemsterhuis' *Œuvres philosophiques* verdanken, bietet uns eine Transkription zweier Anzeigen von Hemsterhuis' Schriften, dem *Brief über das Verlangen* (*Lettre sur les désirs*) und dem *Brief über den Menschen und seine Beziehungen* (*Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*), die in Deutschland sehr früh, bereits 1772, erschienen sind. Diese beiden Anzeigen wurden von Jacob van Sluis zusammen mit Daniel Whistler ins Englische übersetzt. Außerdem stellen wir das französische Original von Hemsterhuis' *Brief über das Verlangen* (*Lettre sur les désirs*) zur Verfügung und schildern kurz die Umstände dessen einflussreicher deutscher Übersetzung,

die Herder 1781 angefertigt hat. Den Abschluss bilden die „Hemsterhuis-Studien“ (1797) von Novalis in einer bisher unveröffentlichten englischen Übersetzung von James D. Reid. Wir möchten Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis und James D. Reid an dieser Stelle unseren Dank aussprechen: Dank der Gesamtheit dieser Stücke deckt die Übersetzungssektion alle drei Jahrzehnte der deutschen Hemsterhuis-Rezeption ab.

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In der Sektion „Varia“ werden die 250. Geburtstage von Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis mit zwei Aufsätzen gefeiert, die von Giovanna Pinna und Jack Haughton stammen. Wir danken Giovanna Pinna für ihren Text, der ein neues Licht auf ein Thema wirft, das von den Studien zur romantischen Ästhetik größtenteils vernachlässigt wurde: die Rolle, die das Kantische Erhabene in der Schlegelschen Auffassung des Schönen spielt. Haughtons Artikel beleuchtet währenddessen das pietistische Erbe in Novalis' Auffassung des Selbst und seiner Religionsphilosophie von einer neuen Seite her. Hinzu kommt ein zutiefst origineller Aufsatz von Daniel McClennan, Gesamtkunstwerk auf seine Weise, über die Kleistsche Rezeption der Philosophie Kants. Der Aufsatz entwickelt Kants Begriff der Aktualität und seine Neuartikulation als Problem bei Kleist; das Ganze ist durchzogen von Zitaten oder Auszügen aus dem *Erdbeben in Chili* und *Penthesilea*, aber auch von Originalzeichnungen des Autors. Die „Varia“ bieten andererseits zwei unveröffentlichte Übersetzungen von Schriften Friedrich Schlegels. Maurizio Malimpensa gibt einen wenig bekannten Text in italienischer Sprache wieder: den Entwurf einer von Friedrich Schlegel geplanten (aber abgebrochenen) Intervention in die öffentlichen Debatten des Atheismusstreits im Deutschland der Jahre 1798 / 1799; Friedrich Schlegel verteidigt darin Fichte, der von seinen Zeitgenossen des Atheismus beschuldigt wurde, so dass er von seinem Amt an der Universität Jena entbunden wurde. Zweitens stellt Joseph Carew eine englische Übersetzung der ersten Hälfte der Einleitung zu den Vorlesungen über „Transzendentalphilosophie“ zur Verfügung, die Friedrich Schlegel im Wintersemester 1800 / 1801 an der Universität Jena gehalten hat. Diese Vorlesungen gehören zu den Texten Schlegels, für die es noch keine vollständige Übersetzung ins Englische, Französische oder Italienische gibt. Joseph Carew gewährt uns hier einen unveröffentlichten Auszug aus einem laufenden Projekt zur Herausgabe einer vollständigen Übersetzung des Textes in englischer Sprache, wofür wir ihm herzlich danken.

Die vorliegende Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* enthält auch zwei Review-Essays. Der erste von David W. Wood verfasste Essay ist nicht ohne Bezug zum Thema der Ausgabe: Er betrachtet die philosophische Behandlung der Polarität in drei neueren Werken über J. W. Goethe und den romantischen Gelehrten J. W. Ritter. Wood behauptet darin, dass auch Goethes wissenschaftliches Denken eine implizite Auseinandersetzung mit Hemsterhuis's Metaphysik des Kosmos enthält. Um den Geburtstag von Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis weiter zu feiern, greift der zweite Bericht (von Laure Cahen-Maurel) anhand zwei Jubiläumsveröffentlichungen die Themen „Symphilosophie“ und Enzyklopädie auf. Er erstellt auch eine kurze Bilanz der Rezeption von Friedrich Schlegels und Novalis' Werken im Verlagswesen zweihundertfünfzig Jahre später.

Fünf Buchbesprechungen runden diese Ausgabe ab. Drei davon – von Luigi Filieri, Alexander Knopf und Victor Béguin – sind bereits als Vorabveröffentlichung auf der Website der Zeitschrift erschienen. Außerdem rezensiert Anne Pollok eine der wichtigsten Neuerscheinungen des Jahres 2021: die Anthologie *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, die von Dalia Nassar und Kristin Gjesdal mit Übersetzungen von Anna C. Ezekiel im Oxford University Press Verlag herausgegeben wurde. Wir freuen uns, dass Anne Pollok das thematische Dossier der nächsten Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* koordinieren wird, das dem unumgänglichen Thema der Ästhetik in Verbindung mit der Problematik der Freiheit gewidmet ist, und insbesondere der Frage, was in der künstlerischen Praxis zur Emanzipation der Frauen beiträgt. Der Call for Papers ist offen und endet am 31. März 2023.

Die fünfte Buchbesprechung schließlich greift eines der aufsehenerregenden Ereignisse der 250. Geburtstage von Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis auf: die Veröffentlichung von Andrea Wulfs Buch *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich*, das im September auf Englisch und im Oktober auf Deutsch erschien.⁹ Frederick C. Beiser, einer der Pioniere der philosophischen Romantik-Forschung, rezensiert das Buch – ein populärwissenschaftliches Unternehmen – und wirft die Frage auf, welcher literarischen Gattung das Buch von Wulf zuzuordnen sei. Beiser hat uns die Ehre erwiesen, eine Version seiner Rezension in deutscher Übersetzung hier zu veröffentlichen – dafür sei ihm herzlich gedankt. Der Originaltext erschien im November in englischer Sprache in der Online-Zeitschrift *The Marginalia*

⁹ Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*. New York: Knopf, 2022. Dies., *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich*. München: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2022. Dieses Buch ist auch ins Spanische und Niederländische übersetzt worden.

*Review of Books*¹⁰; wir möchten auch den Herausgebern dieser Zeitschrift, Samuel Loncar und Alexandra Barlyski, dafür danken, dass sie uns die Erlaubnis erteilt haben, den Text in der Übersetzung zu übernehmen. Schließlich gilt unser Dank Erich Fuchs und Levin Zende, die uns die Freundschaft erwiesen haben, die Qualität des Textes zu kontrollieren und zu sichern.

Abschließend danken wir allen externen Gutachtern für ihr wertvolles Fachwissen und unserem gesamten Redaktionsteam für seine unschätzbare Hilfe. Wie diese Ausgabe 4 hoffentlich zeigt, gibt es im Universum der romantischen Philosophie noch viel Brachland, das es zu beackern gilt.

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Während wir diese Zeilen schreiben, erhalten wir die Nachricht vom Tod Dieter Henrichs, einer herausragenden Persönlichkeit der heutigen Rezeption der klassischen deutschen Philosophie. Unter seinen wichtigsten Beiträgen sei hier die von ihm entwickelte „Konstellationsforschung“¹¹ genannt, ohne die unsere Kenntnis der philosophischen Debatte, die sich in den letzten Jahren des 18. Jahrhunderts entfaltete, sowie der sogenannten geringeren Figuren jener Zeit viel ärmer wäre. Diese Methode ist für die Forschung zur philosophischen Romantik besonders inspirierend gewesen und sein Werk findet auch in diesem Band, der sich in seinem Titel auf wirkliche und metaphysische Konstellationen bezieht, ein Echo.

Bonn & Padua, Dezember 2022

Laure Cahen-Maurel
Giulia Valpione

¹⁰ Siehe Frederick C. Beiser, “Inheriting Autonomy: The German Romantics Reconsidered”, 11. November 2022. In: *The Marginalia Review of Books*. <https://themarginaliareview.com/magnificent-rebels-beiser/>

¹¹ Siehe Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991.

Éditorial : Orbe philosophique

Ce numéro de *Symphilosophie* se veut un numéro doublement commémoratif. Non seulement il s'agit de mettre à l'honneur des nouvelles recherches sur Frans Hemsterhuis, philosophe hollandais largement méconnu de nos jours, dont l'année 2021 marquait le tricentenaire de la naissance. Mais cette année est aussi un anniversaire, celui de la naissance, à moins de deux mois d'écart, de Friedrich Schlegel et de Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), il y a 250 ans : le premier est venu à l'existence le 10 mars 1772 ; le second, le 2 mai.

On sait l'importance de l'amitié entre Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis pour l'avènement du premier romantisme allemand. Mais on oublie souvent qu'avant qu'ils ne « fichticisent » ensemble, l'intérêt pour Hemsterhuis était déjà essentiel. Relatant à son frère l'événement providentiel de leur rencontre à l'université de Leipzig, en 1792, Friedrich Schlegel écrit, comme par référence aux Parques de la mythologie grecque qui filaient les destinées humaines :

Le destin a mis entre mes mains un jeune homme dont tout peut advenir. [...] L'étude de la philosophie lui a conféré une ample facilité à former de belles pensées philosophiques. Il ne vise pas le vrai, mais le beau. Ses écrivains préférés sont Platon et Hemsterhuis. Avec feu, il a exprimé, un des premiers soirs, son opinion selon laquelle il n'y aurait rien de mauvais dans le monde – que tout se rapproche à nouveau de l'âge d'or¹.

C'est donc sous le signe de Hemsterhuis, penseur platonicien, que Friedrich Schlegel apprend à connaître celui qui allait bientôt devenir, de son nom de plume, « Novalis ». C'est-à-dire, littéralement (en latin), terre en jachère, à défricher. Le latin fait également entendre ici l'idée d'étoile nouvelle (*nova*) – plus précisément : d'une déflagration stellaire. On verra plus loin ce que la connexion entre la terre et le ciel, ou plutôt l'amplitude de ce nom d'emprunt et l'exploration de territoires encore inconnus doivent à Hemsterhuis.

La commémoration consécutive du tricentenaire de la naissance de Hemsterhuis et deux cent-cinquantième de celle de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis est pour nous l'occasion de donner accès à un aspect de la philosophie romantique que l'on n'a pas l'habitude de découvrir, tant

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, lettre à August Wilhelm Schlegel de janvier 1792, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (ci-après : KFSA), éd. Ernst Behler *et al.*, Paderborn, Schöningh, vol. 23, 1987, p. 41. Cf. Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (ci-après : HKA), éd. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl et Gerhard Schulz, Stuttgart *et al.*, Kohlhammer, vol. 4, 1998, p. 571.

Hemsterhuis est une figure aujourd'hui négligée. L'influence qu'il a exercée sur ses contemporains, comme, avant lui, celle de son compatriote Spinoza, fut pourtant considérable. Plus considérable en Allemagne que nulle part ailleurs.

Daniel Whistler, Professeur de philosophie au Royal Holloway (Université de Londres), a constitué le dossier thématique du présent numéro. Auteur d'une monographie toute récente, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*², dont l'ambition est de réintégrer Hemsterhuis dans le canon de la philosophie moderne, on lui doit également, en collaboration avec Jacob van Sluis, la première édition anglaise de l'œuvre philosophique, *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*. Deux des trois volumes que compte cette édition ont paru en début d'année ; le troisième est sous presse³.

L'introduction par Daniel Whistler du dossier que nous publions ici se détache en un véritable essai, où chacune des figures ayant joué un rôle dans la réception allemande de Hemsterhuis fait l'objet d'un aperçu. La place de Hemsterhuis « aux côtés » des romantiques allemands y est reconsidérée. Pareille histoire intellectuelle n'avait encore jamais été proposée de façon aussi extensive. Le dossier rassemble, en outre, les fruits de recherches inédites, qui devraient, selon nous, avoir un impact tant sur les études hemsterhuisiennes que sur les études romantiques. Nous voulons exprimer à Daniel Whistler tout particulièrement, ainsi qu'à l'ensemble des contributeurs du dossier, Kirill Chepurin, Viviana Galletta, Jocelyn Holland, Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña et Gabriel Trop, notre profonde gratitude pour avoir mené à bien ce travail admirable.

Daniel Whistler rend notamment compte de la façon dont les premiers romantiques allemands ont fait de Hemsterhuis le « prophète », pour reprendre le terme des romantiques, de l'idéalisme transcendantal. Nous nous contenterons d'évoquer rapidement ici la figure oubliée du Platon batave en rapport avec le titre – « toile cosmique » – que nous avons donné à ce numéro.

² Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

³ Voir Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis (eds.), *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773*, with introductions by Peter Sonderren, Jacob van Sluis and Gabriel Trop, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022 ; et *idem* (eds.), *The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787*, with introductions by Daniel Whistler and Laure Cahen-Maurel, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Le troisième volume, *Philosophical Correspondence and Fragments*, inclut des introductions par Claudia Melica, Henri A. Krop, Peter Sonderren et Jonathan I. Israel.

★

L'image de la toile, en l'occurrence la toile de l'araignée, joue un rôle primordial chez Hemsterhuis. Elle intervient de manière explicite dans la définition de l'essence et de la tâche de la philosophie en ouverture du premier de ses quatre grands dialogues socratiques, *Sophyle ou De la philosophie* (1778)⁴. La philosophie a pour tâche de « faire voir des terres inconnues, d'une étendue immense », et de rendre en cela « l'Univers et nous-mêmes plus riches »⁵. Et c'est la façon dont elle mène cette exploration qui est comparée à l'ouvrage de l'araignée. L'araignée tissant sa toile dessine d'abord un cadre circulaire à partir d'un centre d'où émanent des rayons qui confèrent à l'ensemble une armature. Cette construction lui permet ensuite de parcourir la toile en orbites concentriques, qui s'ajoutent peu à peu pour refermer le cercle en piège de capture. De la même façon, la philosophie, pour Hemsterhuis, dessine une forme en mouvement. Une sphère dont le centre n'est autre que nous-mêmes, sujets pensants ; et la trame, la profusion de cheminements possibles de notre pensée et l'exercice de l'ensemble de nos organes, qui nous permettent de parcourir des couches d'expérience croissantes et ascendantes, d'acquérir une richesse toujours plus grande de connaissances.

Pour constituer le fondement d'une quête véritablement philosophique et atteindre « les vérités les plus éloignées »⁶ – à l'instar des connaissances astronomiques –, l'exercice de notre propre réflexivité doit cependant s'être affranchi de tout préjugé, des systèmes de pensée préétablis, des traditions et savoirs érudits. À la manière de l'araignée sécrétant par ses propres glandes la soie dont les fils de sa toile sont faits et capable d'étendre ceux-ci jusqu'aux cimes des arbres pour franchir des rivières, c'est à nous à rentrer en nous-mêmes, à suivre la piste de notre propre bon sens (ou sens commun) pour nous élever et circuler de la terre au ciel. Du plan des sens à celui de l'esprit. De la matière inerte et du mouvement mécanique qui la régit à la force d'action spontanée de notre volonté libre et aux fins morales. Et de la même façon qu'une toile d'araignée a peu de poids par rapport aux proies qu'elle capture mais les retient pourtant sans se rompre, le fil conducteur du bon sens a beau paraître bien tenu philosophiquement parlant, il n'en conduit pas

⁴ Il convient de signaler au passage la traduction récente qu'Arif Yildiz a fait paraître de ce dialogue de Hemsterhuis en turc. Voir : François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ya da Felsefe Üzerine*, trad. Arif Yildiz, *ViraVerita E-Journal: Interdisciplinary Encounters*, Vol. 15, p. 292-320.

⁵ François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ou De la philosophie*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques. Édition critique*, éd. Jacob van Sluis, Leiden, Brill, 2015, p. 334.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

moins à des découvertes d'une amplitude inouïe. Par « ce moyen – déclare l'Euthyphron du *Sophyle*, avatar de Socrate – nous allons parcourir l'univers sans danger. Le fil du bon sens ne saurait rompre »⁷.

On retrouve l'écho du voyage à travers l'univers et de l'appel impérieux au retour réflexif sur soi dans un des fragments les plus célèbres de tout le corpus romantique, le fragment 16 de *Pollen*. « Nous rêvons de voyages à travers l'univers : l'univers n'est-il pas déjà en nous ? Nous ignorons les profondeurs de notre esprit », écrit Novalis dans ce fragment qui formule de manière poétique le fameux motif du chemin romantique – ce « chemin mystérieux » qui « va vers l'intérieur »⁸. Toutefois, si le « rentrer en soi » de l'esprit est primordial pour le philosophe romantique, cela ne doit pas faire oublier que ce n'est qu'un premier pas sur le chemin de l'objectivité philosophique : pour le romantisme aussi, il faut savoir encore s'arracher à l'intériorité, revenir au monde extérieur. Novalis le rappelle : « Celui qui en reste là [à l'univers intérieur] 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 »⁹. Autrement dit, pour Novalis, macrocosme extérieur et microcosme intérieur se recouvrent et se complètent réciproquement.

Certes le bon sens dont parle Hemsterhuis a sans doute moins d'importance dans la philosophie romantique, dont on peut considérer que le fil conducteur est plutôt, en tout cas chez Novalis, l'imagination créatrice, dans la tradition de l'*Einbildungskraft* de l'idéalisme transcendantal kantien et fichtéen, à ne pas confondre avec la *Fantasie* ; c'est-à-dire la faculté de connexion ou de synthèse par excellence, dont l'activité réglée se situe à la charnière du réel et de l'idéal. Mais la philosophie romantique a, en cela, le même but que la métaphysique de Hemsterhuis : parcourir l'univers dans toute la complexité, la richesse et l'épaisseur empirique ou réelle de ses manifestations.

La proximité avec Hemsterhuis se joue aussi au niveau de la forme. Comme chacun sait, la philosophie romantique est d'une constitution singulière. Elle a l'apparence d'une pensée asystématique, faite de fragments épars sans centre ni unité. Or, ce faisant, elle vise en réalité à tisser un réseau de connexions aussi subtiles que les fils d'une toile d'araignée. À relier

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

⁸ Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, frag. 16, HKA 2, p. 417-419 : « Nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg. » ; *Pollen*, in : *Semences*, trad. fr. O. Schefer, Paris, Allia, 2004, p. 72.

⁹ *Ibid.*, frag. 24, HKA 2, p. 423 ; trad. fr., p. 74. Ce double chemin, intérieur et extérieur, est souvent sous-estimé, y compris par les spécialistes ; sur ce point, voir Laure Cahen-Maurel, « Philosophical Paths », in *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, vol. 2, p. 29.

philosophiquement, en suivant le fil de l'imagination créatrice, des savoirs séparés et des éléments éloignés. Et à les tisser, est-on tenté d'avancer, de façon aussi peu aléatoire que l'est le tissage de l'araignée. L'ensemble ainsi constitué est certes délicat mais en même temps extrêmement solide, tenu mais élastique. Et non pas, comme l'écrit Novalis, « une toile de Pénélope »¹⁰, qui se défait, travail interminable, toujours à recommencer. On se souviendra ici, en tout état de cause, que Novalis attribue expressément à Hemsterhuis l'inspiration philosophique de l'idée d'une « science totale » – idée qui assure le plan de consistance de son projet d'encyclopédie dit du *Brouillon général* : « ENCYCLOPÉDISTIQUE. Nous devons les plus grandes vérités de notre époque au contact entre les membres longtemps séparés de la science totale. Hemsterhuis »¹¹.

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C'est l'importance du motif de la toile d'araignée pour éclairer la méthode d'une pensée procédant par connexions, mais aussi celle de la figure de l'orbe (les orbes concentriques de l'araignée sur terre, la trajectoire décrite par un corps céleste), que cherche à illustrer la couverture de ce numéro. L'œuvre de la couverture est un tableau de fleurs de Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1606-1683), peintre réaliste du siècle d'or néerlandais, contemporain de Rembrandt. Plus exactement, un détail de cette toile, qui arrête le regard : le détail de l'araignée, élément de la vie microcosmique sur Terre. L'araignée du tableau de Jan de Heem commence à filer sa soie translucide et collante pour capturer, au sein de cette vie silencieuse du monde extérieur faite de fleurs et de couleurs opulentes, l'abeille qui butine. Et par ce fil, elle descend et remonte « avec sécurité »¹² de la cime du bouquet au pied du vase, et inversement.

Les orbes concentriques que dessine une toile d'araignée, une fois achevée, peuvent être regardées comme le reflet sur Terre des orbes célestes à l'échelle du macrocosme. Ce double versant est contenu dans l'expression « toile cosmique » : l'expression a en effet un sens technique en astronomie, où elle désigne la distribution de la matière noire et de la matière lumineuse formant la base de l'univers. Dans cette structure en forme de toile, les galaxies sont réparties le long d'un réseau de filaments de gaz d'hydrogène très ténus. Entre ces filaments se trouvent des vides. Les modèles cosmo-

¹⁰ Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, entrée 409, HKA 3, p. 318 ; *Le Brouillon général*, trad. fr. O. Schefer, Paris, Allia, 2000, p. 101.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, entrée 199, HKA 3, p. 275 ; trad. fr., p. 57.

¹² François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ou De la philosophie*, p. 336.

logiques établis par les scientifiques permettaient depuis longtemps de prédire les filaments de gaz dans lesquels les galaxies forment leurs premières étoiles. Mais il aura fallu attendre de pouvoir exploiter les prouesses techniques toutes récentes des derniers télescopes spatiaux pour obtenir des images de la toile cosmique, et l'observer empiriquement. On songera encore ici à la série d'images spectaculaires obtenues par le télescope Webb, qui a détrôné Hubble : révélées au grand public cette année, elles renouvellent notre approche de l'univers lointain.

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De son temps déjà, la philosophie romantique, on l'a dit, entendait s'aventurer dans ces mondes inconnus, dans le droit fil de Hemsterhuis. Passer de la friche terrestre aux astres et aux galaxies. Or parmi ces terres inconnues, il y a un domaine moins exploré encore que celui de l'observation et de l'étude des corps célestes et de l'univers sidéral : l'intrigante conception hemsterhuisienne d'une « face morale de l'univers » supposant, pour l'appréhender, un sens avec son organe spécifique – un « organe moral ».

Plusieurs contributions de ce numéro présentent l'exploration romantique du monde dans sa dimension aussi bien cosmologique (Viviana Galletta, Kirill Chepurin) que morale au sens hemsterhuisien (Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña et Gabriel Trop). Sont abordés, dans ce qui suit, les thèmes centraux de l'« organe moral », d'une « astronomie morale », ou encore de l'« élasticité » de la pensée (Jocelyn Holland).

Le dossier s'accompagne d'un ensemble de traductions auquel ont contribué Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis et James Reid. Daniel Whistler donne ici une traduction inédite en anglais d'extraits de cinq lettres de Hemsterhuis à sa Diotime, la Princesse Galitzine, au sujet de la figure mythologique de Prométhée (en référence, entre autres, au poème éponyme de Goethe). Jacob van Sluis, ancien conservateur à la bibliothèque de l'Université de Groningen, à qui l'on doit l'édition critique des *Œuvres philosophiques* de Hemsterhuis parue chez Brill en 2015, nous offre, lui, la transcription de deux notices annonçant la parution d'écrits de Hemsterhuis, la *Lettre sur les désirs* et la *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, publiées très tôt, dès 1772, en Allemagne. Ces deux notices sont traduites en anglais par Jacob van Sluis, avec Daniel Whistler. Nous présentons également la *Lettre sur les désirs* dans l'original français et retraçons brièvement les circonstances de la traduction allemande qu'en a donnée Herder en 1781, tant son rôle a été déterminant dans la réception de Hemsterhuis en Allemagne. Enfin, le dossier se termine

par les « Études sur Hemsterhuis » (1797) de Novalis, dans une traduction anglaise inédite, dont James D. Reid nous accorde, une fois de plus, la primeur. Nous tenons à témoigner ici à Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis et James Reid notre gratitude : grâce à l'ensemble de ces pièces, le dossier couvre les trois décennies de la réception allemande de Hemsterhuis.

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La section « Varia » célèbre le 250^e anniversaire de la naissance de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis par deux articles, de Giovanna Pinna et Jack Haughton. Nous remercions Giovanna Pinna pour son texte, qui jette une nouvelle lumière sur un thème relativement négligé par les études sur l'esthétique romantique : le rôle joué par le sublime kantien dans la formulation schlegélienne du beau. La contribution de Jack Haughton ré-examine, quant à elle, l'héritage piétiste de la conception novalissienne du soi et de sa philosophie de la religion. À cela s'ajoute un article profondément original, *Gesamtkunstwerk* à sa façon, sur la réception kleistienne de la philosophie de Kant par Daniel McClennan. Ce dernier développe le concept kantien de l'actualité et sa réarticulation en problème chez Kleist ; le tout traversé de citations ou d'extraits du *Tremblement de terre du Chili* et de *Penthésilée*, mais aussi de dessins originaux de l'auteur. Les « Varia » proposent, d'autre part, deux traductions inédites d'écrits schlegéliens. Maurizio Malimpensa donne en langue italienne un texte peu connu : l'ébauche d'une intervention envisagée par Friedrich Schlegel (mais avortée) dans les débats publics de la « querelle de l'athéisme » (*Atheismusstreit*), dans l'Allemagne des années 1798 / 1799 ; Friedrich Schlegel y prend la défense de Fichte, mis en accusation d'athéisme par ses contemporains, au point d'être démis de ses fonctions à l'université d'Iéna. La seconde traduction est une nouvelle traduction en langue anglaise, due à Joseph Carew, de la première moitié de l'Introduction aux leçons de « Philosophie transcendantale », professées par Friedrich Schlegel à l'université d'Iéna au semestre d'hiver 1800 / 1801. Ces leçons font partie des textes de Schlegel dont une traduction intégrale fait toujours défaut tant en anglais, qu'en français ou en italien ; Joseph Carew nous offre cet extrait encore inédit d'un projet en cours d'édition-traduction intégrale du texte en langue anglaise, nous l'en remercions chaleureusement.

La présente livraison de *Symphilosophie* inclut également deux essais-comptes rendus. Le premier, par David W. Wood, n'est pas sans lien avec la thématique du numéro : l'essai considère le traitement philosophique de la polarité dans trois ouvrages récents sur J. W. Goethe et le savant romantique J. W. Ritter ; il soutient que Goethe aussi a été influencé, de manière plus

souterraine, par la métaphysique cosmique de Hemsterhuis. Pour marquer, là encore, le deux-cent cinquantième de la naissance de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis, le second texte, dû à Laure Cahen-Maurel, revient sur les notions de « symphilosophie » et d'encyclopédisme à la faveur de deux publications de circonstance ; et dresse un bref bilan éditorial des œuvres des deux auteurs, deux cent cinquante ans plus tard.

Cinq recensions d'ouvrage complètent ce numéro. Trois d'entre elles – par Luigi Filieri, Alexander Knopf et Victor Béguin – ont déjà paru en prépublication sur le site de la revue. S'y ajoute une recension par Anne Pollok d'une des éditions marquantes de l'année 2021 : l'anthologie *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, publiée aux presses universitaires d'Oxford et due à Dalia Nassar et Kristin Gjesdal, avec la collaboration d'Anna C. Ezekiel.

C'est ici le lieu d'annoncer qu'Anne Pollok nous fait le grand plaisir de coordonner le dossier thématique du prochain numéro de *Symphilosophie*, consacré au thème incontournable de l'esthétique, en lien avec la problématique de la liberté, et particulièrement de ce qui, dans la pratique artistique, œuvre à l'émancipation des femmes. L'appel à contribution est ouvert, il se clôturera le 31 mars 2023.

Enfin, la cinquième recension du présent numéro de *Symphilosophie* se fait l'écho d'un des événements du deux-cent-cinquantième de la naissance de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis qui a fait grand bruit : la parution, consécutivement en anglais au mois de septembre et en allemand au mois d'octobre, du livre d'Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*¹³. Frederick C. Beiser, un des pionniers des études philosophiques sur le romantisme, en fait la critique, en soulevant la question du genre auquel le livre, entreprise de vulgarisation scientifique, appartient. F. C. Beiser nous a fait l'honneur de sa confiance pour publier ici une version de sa recension en traduction allemande – qu'il en soit vivement remercié. Le texte original a paru en langue anglaise au mois de novembre, dans la revue en ligne *The Marginalia Review of Books*¹⁴ ; nous tenons également à remercier les directeurs de cette revue, Samuel Loncar et Alexandra Barlyski, pour nous avoir autorisés à reprendre le texte en traduction. Enfin, notre

¹³ Voir Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*, New York, Knopf, 2022 ; *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich*, München, C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2022. Le livre a également été déjà traduit en espagnol et en néerlandais.

¹⁴ Voir Frederick C. Beiser, « Inheriting Autonomy: The German Romantics Reconsidered », publié en ligne le 11 novembre 2022: <https://themarginaliareview.com/magnificent-rebels-beiser/>

gratitude va à Erich Fuchs et à Levin Zende, qui nous ont fait l'amitié d'en contrôler et d'en assurer la qualité.

Cet éditorial ne serait pas complet sans avoir remercié chaleureusement l'ensemble des relecteurs externes à la revue pour leurs précieuses expertises, ainsi que l'ensemble de notre équipe de rédaction pour le travail accompli. Comme ce numéro 4 – espérons-le – le montre, il reste bien des terres à défricher dans l'univers immense de la philosophie romantique.

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Nous finissions d'écrire ces pages lorsque nous est parvenue la nouvelle du décès de Dieter Henrich, figure éminente de la réception contemporaine de la philosophie allemande classique. Parmi ses nombreuses contributions majeures, nous tenons ici à mentionner en particulier la méthode qu'il avait élaborée de la *Konstellationsforschung*¹⁵, sans laquelle notre connaissance des débats philosophiques ainsi que des figures soi-disant mineures des dernières années du XVIII^e siècle serait bien plus pauvre. Les recherches sur la philosophie romantique lui sont profondément redevables. Et son œuvre trouve un écho y compris dans le présent volume, voué dans son titre même à des constellations tant réelles que métaphysiques.

Bonn et Padoue, décembre 2022

Laure Cahen-Maurel
Giulia Valpione

¹⁵ Voir Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1991.

Editoriale: Orbita filosofica

L'ultimo numero di *Symphilosophie*, che qui introduciamo, è doppiamente commemorativo. Da un lato è dedicato ad alcune nuove ricerche su François Hemsterhuis, filosofo olandese attualmente ancora misconosciuto e di cui ricorreva nel 2021 il tricentenario dal genetliaco. Dall'altro, celebra i 250 anni dalla nascita di Friedrich Schlegel e Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis): Schlegel viene alla luce il 10 marzo 1772, Hardenberg il 2 maggio 1772.

I due anniversari si incrociano: se l'importanza dell'amicizia tra Friedrich Schlegel e Novalis per la genesi del Primo Romanticismo Tedesco è cosa nota, ciò che viene spesso dimenticato è che, prima del loro "fichticizzare" insieme, i due condividevano già un altro interesse: quello per la filosofia di Hemsterhuis. Questo aspetto, spesso dimenticato, è dimostrato da una lettera di Friedrich Schlegel al fratello August Wilhelm, in cui viene raccontato il primo incontro con Novalis all'università di Leipzig nel 1792, e che fa riferimento alle Parche, tessitrici dei destini umani:

Il destino ha messo nelle mie mani un giovane che può divenire qualsiasi cosa. [...] Lo studio della filosofia gli ha donato l'ampia facilità a formare bei pensieri filosofici. Non punta al vero, ma al bello. I suoi scrittori preferiti sono Platone e Hemsterhuis. Un delle prime sere mi ha espresso con ardore la sua visione per cui non c'è nulla di maligno nel mondo – e che tutto si sta nuovamente avvicinando all'Età d'oro.¹

Quindi è sotto l'egida di Hemsterhuis (il "Platone olandese", come lo chiamavano i suoi contemporanei) che Friedrich Schlegel fa conoscenza con colui il quale adottò di lì a poco tempo lo pseudonimo di "Novalis" – nome che in latino designa letteralmente la "terra non arata" e al contempo rimanda alle stelle dette "novae", o meglio all'esplosione nucleare che porta al loro sorgere. Come vedremo più oltre, la connessione tra Terra e cielo, la vastità, l'esplorazione di territori sconosciuti, a cui quello pseudonimo fa riferimento, derivano in parte dalla filosofia di Hemsterhuis.

La vicinanza tra le commemorazioni della nascita di Hemsterhuis, Friedrich Schlegel e Novalis offre l'occasione di rivisitare un punto cruciale della filosofia romantica ancora poco esplorato: l'eredità del filosofo olandese

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Brief an August Wilhelm Schlegel. Januar 1792*, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (KFSA), hrsg. von Ernst Behler et al., Bd. XXIII, Paderborn, Schöningh, p. 41. Cfr. anche Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke von Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (HKA), hrsg. von Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl und Gerhard Schulz, Bd. IV, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1998, p. 571-572.

nelle riflessioni dei due pensatori romantici. La scarsa attenzione per questo tema è sorprendente in quanto l'influenza di Hemsterhuis sui suoi contemporanei (in particolare in Germania) era diffusa e profonda.

La sezione tematica di questo numero di *Symphilosophie* è stata curata da Daniel Whistler, professore di Filosofia alla Royal Holloway della University of London. Autore di una monografia fresca di stampa (*François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*),² il cui obiettivo è di integrare il filosofo olandese nel canone del pensiero moderno, Daniel Whistler ha anche edito (con Jacob von Sluis) la prima edizione inglese delle opere di Hemsterhuis: *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*. Due dei tre volumi previsti sono stati pubblicati all'inizio di quest'anno, mentre il terzo sarà presto disponibile nelle librerie.³

L'introduzione alla sezione monografica è firmata dallo stesso Daniel Whistler, ed essa costituisce in realtà un vero e proprio saggio, in quanto include dei brevi approfondimenti su tutte le figure che hanno giocato un ruolo nella recezione dell'opera di Hemsterhuis in Germania, includendo anche una presentazione del suo peso nel Romanticismo tedesco. Un tale preziosissimo quadro d'insieme viene delineato per la prima volta.

La parte centrale di questa sezione monografica è costituita da sette articoli inediti, che, insieme all'introduzione, crediamo avrà un forte impatto sia sugli studi dedicati a Hemsterhuis che su quelli dedicati al Romanticismo. Cogliamo l'occasione per esprimere i nostri ringraziamenti a Daniel Whistler, Kirill Chepurin, Viviana Galletta, Jocelyn Holland, Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña e a Gabriel Trop per il loro lavoro.

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Il presente quarto volume di *Symphilosophie* è intitolato "ragnatela cosmica". L'immagine della tela del ragno gioca un ruolo fondamentale nella metafisica di Hemsterhuis. Nelle pagine iniziali del primo dei suoi quattro dialoghi di stampo socratico (*Sophylus, o sulla filosofia, 1778*),⁴ Hemsterhuis utilizza

² Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022.

³ I primi due volumi, editi da Daniel Whistler e Jacob van Sluis sono: *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022 e *The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Il terzo volume, *Philosophical Correspondence and Fragments* sarà pubblicato dalla medesima casa editrice.

⁴ Segnaliamo che Arif Yildiz ha recentemente tradotto questo dialogo in turco: François Hemsterhuis, "Sophyle ya da Felsefe Üzerine", *ViraVerita E-Journal: Interdisciplinary Encounters*, 15, 2022, p. 292-320.

infatti quest'analogia per definire l'essenza e il compito della filosofia: la sua missione è «di mostrare immensi territori sconosciuti», e in questo modo «rendere l'universo e noi stessi ancor più ricchi». ⁵ E per l'appunto, il metodo filosofico con cui questa esplorazione viene compiuta è comparato al procedere del ragno. Per tessere la sua tela, il ragno crea prima di tutto un circolo a partire da un centro da cui si dipanano i raggi che danno struttura all'insieme. Questa costruzione, che procede verso l'esterno a partire da un centro, permette al ragno di muoversi attorno alla propria tela seguendo delle orbite circolari. Orbite circolari che vengono continuamente aumentate di numero, allo scopo di catturare più efficientemente la preda. In modo simile procede la filosofia, secondo Hemsterhuis: essa realizza un circolo il cui centro è costituito proprio da noi stessi, in quanto soggetti pensanti. E l'intelaiatura di queste orbite non è altro che la profusione di tutte le strade percorribili dal pensiero, permettendogli di passare attraverso diversi livelli di esperienza, e di raggiungere una sempre più ricca conoscenza.

Per costituire la base di un'inchiesta veramente filosofica e per raggiungere le «verità più remote» ⁶ – analogamente alla conoscenza astronomica –, la nostra riflessione deve essere liberata da ogni pregiudizio, da ogni sistema di pensiero prestabilito, da qualsiasi tradizione ed erudizione astratta. Così come il ragno secerne dalle proprie ghiandole la seta atta ad estendere la tela fino alle cime degli alberi, oltrepassando financo i fiumi, così sta a noi rivolgere lo sguardo verso noi stessi, seguire il percorso del buon senso (o senso comune) per elevarci e circondare la Terra e il cielo. Dal dominio dei sensi fino a quello dello spirito; dalla materia inerte e i movimenti meccanici che la attraversano, alla forza attiva e spontanea della volontà libera e dei fini morali. Inoltre, allo stesso modo in cui la tela del ragno è leggera, se comparata al peso delle prede intrappolate in essa, il filo conduttore del nostro senso comune sembra ben fragile e inadatto a segnare il percorso filosofico da seguire: ciononostante, esso conduce a delle scoperte di immensa ampiezza. «Attraverso questo mezzo – dichiara Euthyphro, personificazione di Socrate, in *Sophylus* – noi percorriamo l'universo senza correre alcun pericolo. Il filo del buon senso non può essere spezzato». ⁷

Il viaggio attraverso l'universo e l'imperativo alla riflessione su sé stessi si ritrova in uno dei frammenti più famosi dell'intero *corpus* romantico, ovvero

⁵ L'intero corpus hemsterhuisiano è stato tradotto in italiano nel pionieristico lavoro di Claudia Melica: François Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, a cura di Claudia Melica, Napoli, Vivarium, 2001. Le citazioni presenti in questa introduzione sono ad opera di chi scrive. François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ou De la philosophie*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques. Édition critique*, éd. Jacob van Sluis, Leiden, Brill, 2015, p. 334.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

il frammento numero 16 di *Polline*. «Sogniamo di viaggi attraverso l'universo: ma l'universo non è forse in noi? Non conosciamo le profondità del nostro spirito», scrive Novalis in questo frammento, che riformula poeticamente il famoso motivo romantico: «La via segreta conduce all'interno».⁸ Il filosofo romantico ci ricorda però che non dobbiamo restare confinati nel mondo interiore, ma che è necessario «uscire nuovamente verso il mondo».⁹ In altre parole, per Novalis il microcosmo interiore e il macrocosmo esteriore si sovrappongono e si completano.

Certo, la nozione hemsterhuisiana di “senso comune” è meno centrale nella filosofia romantica, il cui filo conduttore è invece, nel caso di Novalis, l'immaginazione creativa o produttiva – da non confondere con la *Fantasie*. L'immaginazione creativa è la facoltà della connessione o della sintesi *par excellence*, la cui attività si colloca tra il reale e l'ideale. In questo senso, la filosofia di Novalis ha lo stesso obiettivo della metafisica di Hemsterhuis: percorrere l'universo in tutta la sua complessità, attraversando tutta la ricchezza delle sue manifestazioni empiriche.

La vicinanza del Romanticismo con Hemsterhuis è evidente non solo a livello di contenuto, ma anche di forma. Lo stile peculiare della filosofia romantica è ben conosciuto: si mostra spesso come un pensiero a-sistematico, costituito da frammenti privi di un centro o di un'unità. Eppure, allo stesso tempo tesse una trama interconnessa, sottile come la tela di un ragno. Attraverso l'immaginazione creativa, mira a superare filosoficamente i diversi modi della conoscenza e connettere elementi distanti. A tal proposito, si deve anche ricordare che i Romantici attribuiscono esplicitamente a Hemsterhuis l'ispirazione filosofica dell'idea di “scienza totale” – un'idea sottostante, a solo titolo d'esempio, al progetto enciclopedico di Novalis: «ENCICLOPEDISTICA. Le più grandi verità dei nostri giorni le dobbiamo al contatto tra le membra a lungo separate della scienza totale. Hemsterhuis».¹⁰

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⁸ «Nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg», Novalis, *Blüthenstaub*, HKA II, p. 419, 16; *Polline*, in August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum 1798-1800*, a cura di Giorgio Cusatelli, tr. di Elena Agazzi e Donatella Mazza, Milano, Bompiani, 2008, p. 51, 16.

⁹ Questo doppio percorso è spesso dimenticato; cfr. Laure Cahen-Maurel, “Philosophical Paths”, in Daniel Whistler, Jacob von Sluis (ed.), *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, vol. 2, p. 29.

¹⁰ Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, HKA III, p. 275, 199; *L'«Allgemeines Brouillon»*, tr. it. a cura di Fabrizio Desideri e Giampiero Moretti, Brescia, Morcelliana, 2019, p. 736, 199.

L'opera d'arte in copertina per questo numero di *Symphilosophie* evoca allo stesso modo l'importante metodo sopra nominato, per cui la conoscenza procede per interconnessioni. La natura morta dell'immagine è stata dipinta da Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1606-1683), un pittore realista dell'Età d'Oro olandese contemporaneo di Rembrandt. In questo quadro si ritrova un dettaglio impercettibile, che attira la nostra attenzione: un ragno, elemento del microcosmo vivente, mentre tesse la propria trappola, in procinto di catturare un'ape, strappandola da quella vita silenziosa del mondo esteriore, fatto di fiori e colori opulenti. Percorrendo la propria tela, il ragno è però in grado di salire e scendere ripetutamente dall'apice dei fiori fino alla base del vaso «in sicurezza».¹¹

Riprendendo il rapporto tra micro e macrocosmo, l'orbita terrena della ragnatela può essere vista anche come uno specchio delle orbite celesti. E il titolo che abbiamo dato al presente volume, “ragnatela cosmica”, riflette questi due aspetti. Infatti, questa espressione ha un significato tecnico, nell'astronomia odierna. La “ragnatela cosmica” indica la distribuzione di materia oscura e materia visibile che costituisce la base dell'universo, e all'interno di questo reticolo le galassie sono distribuite lungo filamenti di materia. Da molto tempo i modelli cosmologici sono in grado di predire teoricamente la posizione dei filamenti di materia da cui si formano stelle, ma abbiamo dovuto attendere le ultime innovazioni tecnologiche nel campo dei telescopi spaziali per ottenere delle immagini di quest'intelaiatura cosmica e sancirne così l'esistenza empirica: basti pensare alle spettacolari immagini catturate dal telescopio Webb, che ha sostituito lo Hubble. Rivelate al pubblico solo quest'anno, queste immagini hanno approfondito la nostra comprensione delle galassie nello spazio profondo.

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La filosofia romantica, sulla scia tracciata da Hemsterhuis, si è avventurata verso mondi sconosciuti (dalla Terra fino agli astri) già tra '700 e '800. E tra queste terre sconosciute c'è un'area meno esplorata dei corpi celesti e dell'universo siderale: l'intrigante concezione hemsterhuisiana di un “volto morale dell'universo”, che presuppone un senso, un organo specifico atto ad afferrarlo – l'“organo morale”.

Diversi articoli pubblicati in questo numero di *Symphilosophie* indagano l'esplorazione romantica del mondo nella sua dimensione cosmologica (Viviana Galletta, Kirill Chepurin), e morale (nel senso hemsterhuisiano del

¹¹ François Hemsterhuis, *Sophyle ou De la philosophie*, p. 336.

termine): Andrew J. Mitchell, Santiago Napoli, Carlos Zorrilla Piña e Gabriel Trop. Ancora, vengono toccati i temi centrali dell’“organo morale”, “astronomia morale”, per non parlare dell’“elasticità” del pensiero (Jocelyn Holland).

Questi articoli sono accompagnati da un gruppo di traduzioni ad opera di Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis e James Reid. Daniel Whistler firma l’inedita traduzione inglese di estratti dalle cinque lettere di Hemsterhuis alla sua “Diotima”, la principessa Gallitzin. Queste lettere riguardano la figura mitologica di Prometeo, parzialmente ispirate dall’omonimo poema goethiano. Jacob van Sluis – precedentemente bibliotecario dell’Università di Gottinga e autore dell’edizione critica delle *Œuvres philosophiques* di Hemsterhuis pubblicate nel 2015 per Brill – ha trascritto per noi due recensioni, pubblicate a Francoforte nel 1772, della *Lettre sur les désirs* e della *Lettre sur l’homme et ses rapports*. Queste due recensioni sono inoltre pubblicate qui nella traduzione inglese ad opera di Jacob van Sluis e Daniel Whistler. Pubblichiamo inoltre l’originale francese della *Lettre sur les désirs*. Sua traduzione tedesca del 1781 ad opera di Herder destinata ad influenzare enormemente il dibattito filosofico del tempo. La sezione dedicata alle traduzioni si chiude infine con la prima versione inglese integrale delle *Hemsterhuis Studien* (1797) di Novalis. Ringraziamo sinceramente Daniel Whistler, Jacob van Sluis e James Reid: questi testi forniscono una vivida immagine della recezione tedesca di Hemsterhuis.

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La sezione “Miscellanea” celebra invece l’anniversario dei 250 anni dalla nascita di Friedrich Schlegel e Novalis attraverso gli articoli di Giovanna Pinna e Jack Haughton. Il primo porta nuova luce su un tema spesso dimenticato negli studi sull’estetica romantica: il ruolo giocato dal sublime kantiano nella concezione schlegeliana del bello. Jack Haughton, invece, scandaglia l’eredità pietistica nella concezione novalisiana dell’Io e della religione. C’è inoltre un terzo articolo, in questa sezione: un testo che costituisce un vero e proprio *Gesamtkunstwerk*, scritto da Daniel McClennan e che concerne la ricezione in Kleist della filosofia kantiana. McClennan si focalizza qui sul concetto di attualità e sul suo sviluppo all’interno dell’opera di Kleist, in particolare nei suoi *Terremoto in Cile* e *Pentesilea*, includendo inoltre dei disegni creati dalla mano dell’autore.

La sezione “Miscellanea” contiene anche due traduzioni originali degli scritti di Friedrich Schlegel. Maurizio Malimpensa fornisce una versione in

italiano di un testo poco conosciuto – la bozza di un intervento scritto (ma pubblicato postumo) da Friedrich Schlegel progettato per prendere posizione all'interno dell'*Atheismusstreit* (1798-1799). In questo breve testo Schlegel difende Fichte dall'accusa di ateismo che lo portò anche alle dimissioni dall'Università di Jena. La seconda traduzione, invece, è la versione inglese ad opera di Joseph Carew di un estratto dall'*Introduzione* delle *Lezioni di filosofia trascendentale* tenute a Jena nel semestre invernale tra il 1800 e il 1801. Si noti che di queste lezioni mancano ancora le traduzioni integrali in inglese, francese e italiano. Ringraziamo sinceramente Joseph Carew per questo estratto dalla sua edizione completa del testo schlegeliano.

Questo numero di *Symphilosophie* include anche due “Note”. La prima trae lo spunto da tre recenti pubblicazioni su J. W. Goethe e J. W. Ritter; questa nota (*Window to Goethe's Colour Revolution* di David W. Wood) tratta di una vera e propria “filosofia dei poli” presente in questi due filosofi. Wood conclude inoltre che anche il pensiero scientifico di Goethe nasconde un rapporto sotterraneo con la metafisica hemsterhuisiana del cosmo. La seconda “Nota” è ad opera di Laure Cahen-Maurel, che riprende alcuni punti essenziali brevemente esposti in questo editoriale, proponendo un rendiconto delle edizioni delle opere novalisiane e schlegeliane, con uno sguardo rivolto ai vari eventi commemorativi per il doppio giubileo.

A completare questo volume ci sono cinque recensioni. Tre di queste (di Luigi Filieri, Alexander Knopf e Victor Béguin) erano già state pubblicate in versione “pre-print” sul sito della rivista. La quarta recensione è firmata da Anne Pollok, che scrive a proposito di una delle più importanti pubblicazioni dell'anno 2021, ovvero l'antologia *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, pubblicata da Oxford University Press, edita da Dalia Nassar e Kristin Gjesdal con la collaborazione di Anna C. Ezekiel.

Cogliamo l'occasione per annunciare con gioia che Anne Pollok sarà *guest editor* per il prossimo numero di *Symphilosophie*, che giungerà così al suo quinto volume, dedicato all'estetica romantica e alla sua connessione con il tema della libertà, con un'attenzione particolare alla pratica artistica intesa come strumento d'emancipazione per le donne del tempo. La *call for papers* è ancora aperta e il termine ultimo per la consegna delle proposte di articoli è fissato per il 31 marzo 2023.

Infine, la quinta recensione rimanda nuovamente al 250esimo dalla nascita di Schlegel e Novalis, in quanto prende in considerazione un volume che ha ricevuto molta attenzione da parte della stampa: *Magnificent Rebels*:

The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self di Andrea Wulf,¹² pubblicato in inglese in settembre (2022) e in tedesco in ottobre. Frederick C. Beiser, uno dei pionieri degli studi filosofici sul Romanticismo tedesco, compie una lettura critica del volume di Wulf, interrogando in particolare il genere letterario a cui il libro appartiene. Siamo grate a F. C. Beiser per averci permesso di pubblicare il suo testo inizialmente apparso in inglese per la rivista online *The Marginalia Review of Book*.¹³ Vogliamo inoltre ringraziare gli editori della rivista, Samuel Loncar e Alexandra Barlyski, per averci concesso l'autorizzazione di ripubblicare la recensione nella sua versione tedesca. Ringraziamo anche Erich Fuchs e Levin Zende, che hanno gentilmente contribuito attraverso le loro preziose correzioni della traduzione.

In guisa di conclusione, esprimiamo il nostro ringraziamento ai revisori esterni per il loro essenziale lavoro, e a tutta la redazione per il loro impagabile aiuto. Come speriamo sia in grado di mostrare questo quarto volume, nell'universo della filosofia romantica c'è ancora molto territorio sconosciuto da esplorare.

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Mentre finiamo di scrivere queste parole, ci giunge la triste notizia della dipartita di Dieter Henrich, figura eminente nella ricezione odierna della filosofia classica tedesca. Tra i suoi importantissimi contributi, ricordiamo qui la *Konstellationsforschung*, metodo di ricerca da lui elaborato,¹⁴ senza la quale la nostra conoscenza del dibattito filosofico sviluppatosi negli ultimi anni del '700 sarebbe estremamente più povero: grazie a lui i filosofi e le filosofe cosiddetti/e "minori", ma anche le lettere, recensioni e scritti occasionali – a cui la *Romantik* spesso affidava il proprio pensiero – hanno guadagnato, agli occhi di tutto il mondo accademico, lo statuto di testo filosofico. Riconoscendo il nostro immenso debito nei suoi confronti, pensiamo che non ci sia tributo più adatto di questo volume, che alle orbite e alle costellazioni filosofiche rimanda, fin dal titolo.

Bonn e Padova, dicembre 2022

Laure Cahen-Maurel
Giulia Valpione

¹² Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*, New York, Knopf, 2022; tr. ted. *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich*, München, C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2022. Il volume è stato tradotto anche in spagnolo e olandese.

¹³ Frederick C. Beiser, "Inheriting Autonomy: The German Romantics Reconsidered", in *The Marginalia Review of Books*: <https://themarginaliareview.com/magnificent-rebels-beiser/>. Consultato l'11 novembre 2022.

¹⁴ Dieter Henrich, *Konstellationen. Probleme und Debatten am Ursprung der idealistischen Philosophie (1789-1795)*, Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1991.

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Hemsterhuis in Germany: An Introduction

*Daniel Whistler**

“Hemsterhuis is a German because only here he
found a public.”

—Friedrich Schlegel (1958-2002: 18.344)

“Few authors have received as many elegies as
Hemsterhuis; few are as forgotten today.”

—Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron (1988: 114)

The following dossier of essays charts the ways in which François Hemsterhuis influenced, provoked, challenged and stimulated philosophical reflection in Jena and other sites of romanticism during the last years of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth. The essays all attempt to show why Hemsterhuis mattered to the early German romantics and so should matter to all of us interested in German romanticism.¹ And, in this introduction, I wish to briefly furnish some of the background to these essays in two ways—first, by providing a bare-bones summary of the intellectual history of Hemsterhuis’s German reception² and, secondly (in a marked change of tone), by schematising some of the ways in which Hemsterhuis’s philosophy can be and has been ‘romanticised’ in the essays that follow, so as to stand *alongside* the philosophies of Novalis, the Schlegels, Schelling, Jean Paul, Günderröde and others.

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¹ The dossier has been timed to celebrate (approximately) the tricentenary of Hemsterhuis’s birth, as well as the first edition of his work in English (*The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*).

² For more detailed accounts of Hemsterhuis’s German reception in English than I can provide here, see Moenkemeyer (1977), Cahen-Maurel (2022) and Trop (2022).

1. The Becoming-German of Hemsterhuis

Hemsterhuis—‘*virī dignissimi dignissimo filio*’, in Herder’s phrase (1977-2016: 2.287), i.e., son of the founder of the *schola Hemsterhuisiana*, Tiberius Hemsterhuis—lived from 1721 to 1790 in Franeker in his youth, then in Leiden in his student days and, after a more migratory decade, from 1755 onwards in The Hague as a secretary to the Dutch Council of State. He was one of the last great representatives of the European republic of letters, as suggested by the fact that, while he signed his published work François, he had been baptised Franciscus, was known in his native Dutch as Frans and came to be known among his German ‘public’ as Franz. He was a military engineer; a pioneering inventor of telescopes and other optical instruments, including the first ever binocular achromatic eyepiece; a regular at the intellectual salons of The Hague replete with politicians, government officials and visiting dignitaries; a practising scientist with interests not only in optics, but also the anatomy of polyps, snails, dragonflies and microscopic parasites; an aficionado of engraved gemstones, assisting with the Prince of Orange’s collection and building up his own ‘cabinet’ that was subsequently inherited by Goethe; and a draughtsman and designer of, among other things, funerary monuments for Herman Boerhaave and J. G. Hamann. Moreover, from at least 1753 onwards³, Hemsterhuis also thought of himself *as a philosopher*.

His philosophical reputation (e.g., as ‘the most original Dutch thinker of the eighteenth century’ [Wielema 1993: 109]) rests on a relatively small body of eight short writings in French, most of which were originally circulated in semi-private form: *Lettre sur une pierre antique* (1762), *Lettre sur la sculpture* (written in 1765, published in 1769), *Lettre sur les désirs* (1770), *Lettre sur l’homme et ses rapports* (1772), *Description philosophique du caractère de feu monsieur F. Fagel* (1773), *Sophyle ou de la philosophie* (1778), *Aristée ou de la divinité* (1779), *Simon ou des facultés de l’âme* (written between 1779 and 1783, first published in French posthumously), *Alexis ou de l’âge d’or* (written in 1781, published by Jacobi in 1789), and *Lettre de Dioclès à Diotime, sur l’athéisme* (first drafted in 1787; revised and then published by Jacobi in 1789). These writings are typically divided in two—based on contextual, chronological and formal grounds (although not doctrinal ones): the early letters written from 1762 to 1773 within a circle of ‘Orangist’, anti-materialist civil servants, bankers and connoisseurs and, then, the four dialogues written across a four-year burst of activity from 1778 to 1782 and inspired (in part) by a new friendship with the Berlin-born, Amalie Gallitzin. Owing to

³ I.e., when he first describes himself as a ‘philosopher’ in extant correspondence (B 12.4, 12.5).

Gallitzin's move to Münster in Summer 1779, the last of these dialogues (and *Alexis* in particular) were written with one foot in Germany.⁴

Hemsterhuis's philosophy during the 1780s (what one might call, the 'third Hemsterhuis', after the letters and dialogues) would come to be dominated by this German context, even though he occasionally admitted to less than proficient German language skills.⁵ Indeed, like many well-received thinkers, the last years of Hemsterhuis's biography become blurred into his reception history—and, in this case, such a reception-history was (to begin with, at least⁶) predominantly *German*. Hemsterhuis visited Münster four times after Gallitzin's relocation: on the second occasion (in early 1781), he extended his journey to Düsseldorf to meet F. H. Jacobi on his Pempelfort estate; and, on the third occasion (Summer / Autumn 1785), he toured central Germany alongside Gallitzin and Franz von Fürstenberg, visiting, among other places, Gotha (where he assisted the Duke of Gotha in installing a Hemsterhuis-designed telescope), Dresden (where he toured the art galleries)⁷ and Weimar. It was in Weimar that Hemsterhuis was introduced to J. W. Goethe, J. G. Herder and C. M. Wieland—all of whom had long been interested in his philosophy. J. H. Merck wrote to Petrus Camper in December 1785, 'Everyone in Gotha and Weimar is taken with enthusiasm for Mr. Hemsterhuis. I hope with my whole heart that he is forming the same happy idea of those who do justice to his superiority' (in Trunz 1971: 167); and Wieland had reported to Jacobi a few weeks earlier, 'This man is, in my estimation, one of the most perfect men who has ever existed; he comes close to being the Plato *of our time*; in his head everything appears so perfectly neat and arranged as in a Dutch nature-cabinet; he appears to know everything that is worth knowing and all his ideas have been brought into order, which makes him the most happy of men, as he is also one of the most worthy of devotion and respect' (in Hammacher 1971: 6).

On his return from Weimar and as a result of his increasing involvement (via Jacobi) in the *Spinozismusstreit*, Hemsterhuis began an intensive reading programme of contemporary German philosophy and literature, including Goethe's plays and novels, Herder's philosophical works, Jacobi's polemics

⁴ Prior to Gallitzin's move in 1779, Hemsterhuis seems to have had relatively little interest in German thought, with the exceptions of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, Lambert's cosmology (see *B* 3.67) and a slight acquaintance of some form with Moses Mendelssohn (see below).

⁵ See, e.g., *B* 6.26. How seriously these remarks should be taken is another matter considering how much German-language material Hemsterhuis digested during the final years of his life.

⁶ Hemsterhuis did also go on to have significant receptions in the Dutch Republic (e.g., the Groningen School) and among the French spiritualists (Maine de Biran, Cousin).

⁷ See *B* 12.147; Sondereren 2000: 203-14.

against Mendelssohn and even some Kant. This formed the backdrop to Hemsterhuis's last publication—the *Lettre sur l'athéisme*—which initially appeared in the second edition to Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe*. It is in this way that the story of Hemsterhuis's philosophy increasingly became a German one, such that, with Poritsky, one might say that, while Hemsterhuis 'was Dutch, thought in Greek and wrote in French', he 'was read predominantly in Germany' (1926: 30).

2. The 'German' Hemsterhuis

Hemsterhuis's immediate impact in Germany was remarkably extensive and, in this section, I want to provide a cursory survey of some of the landmarks which occurred before and alongside his romantic reception⁸ (which will then itself be resumed in §3 below). What follows takes the form of an alphabetised glossary of German thinkers influenced by Hemsterhuis (in order to avoid telling any narrative that prejudge the essays to follow).⁹

a) Franz von Baader

Baader read Herder's translation of the *Lettre sur les désirs* alongside Herder's own *Liebe und Selbstheit* in 1786, before embarking on a detailed reading of Hemsterhuis's works themselves in 1788—with a focus on *Aristée*. His claim in the 1798 *Über das pythagoreische Quadrat in der Natur* that 'Hemsterhuis makes use of the somewhat adventurous sounding and yet true expression of calling the body a coagulated spirit, and the corporeal universe a coagulated god' (2021: 246) is often taken to be the highpoint of Hemsterhuis's influence (see, e.g., Ayrault 1961: 1.484, Krop 2009: 1182). Nevertheless, it was a misattribution (even if an influential one)—and the history of this misattribution is explored in Zorrilla's essay below (see also Bonchino 2014: 15-23).

b) F. A. Boeck

As Vieillard-Baron pointed out forty years ago, 'The nostalgia for Plato among the students of Tübingen cannot be understood without reference to Hemsterhuis' (1988: 115) and this image of a Hemsterhuisian Plato (as well

⁸ That is, prior to Johann Neeb's 1814 essay, 'Über Hemsterhuis und den Geist seiner Schriften'. It is worth noting that Hemsterhuis makes a few comments about his German reception that are difficult to pin down, such as an extract made of the *Lettre sur l'homme* by a 'Haller' (B 1.122).

⁹ Elsewhere, I have tried to tell this story briefly in terms of a 'Münster Hemsterhuis', a 'Düsseldorf Hemsterhuis', a 'Weimar Hemsterhuis', a 'Tübingen Hemsterhuis' and a 'Jena Hemsterhuis' (Whistler 2022a: xiv-xviii).

as a Platonic Hemsterhuis) transmitted to the students of the *Stift* in the early 1790s—among them, Hegel, Hölderlin and Schelling—was in part due to the teaching of Friedrich August Boeck who promulgated Hemsterhuis’s ideas (see, e.g., Drees 1995: 535, Franz 2012: 80-2, Melica 2007: 148). Alongside Herder and Jacobi, Boeck is one of the key intermediaries in the transmission of Hemsterhuisian philosophy to the generation of the 1790s.

c) Karl von Dalberg

Before turning to affairs of state in his maturity, the young Karl von Dalberg gave Hemsterhuis a significant role in his *Betrachtungen über das Universum* (e.g., 1777: 7) which argued for a universal, if asymptotic tendency to unification, i.e. love as a metaphysical *Band* holding together the entire universe. Dalberg writes, for example, in a broadly Hemsterhuisian vein, ‘Love is ... unity is perfection in God. Creation strives to approximate to unity.’ (1777: 136-7; see Bonchino 2014: 53-6). Dalberg and Hemsterhuis later met in Erfurt in 1785 (see Brummel 1925: 294-5), and van Sluis (in Hemsterhuis 2015: 59) conjectures that he was responsible for producing the third volume of Hemsterhuis’s *Vermischte philosophische Schriften* in 1797. Dalberg’s *Betrachtungen* was also one of the triggers for both Friedrich Schlegel’s and Franz von Baader’s turn to Hemsterhuis much later and may have been responsible for Hemsterhuisian resonances in Schiller’s work. Karl’s younger brother, Hugo von Dalberg, corresponded with Hemsterhuis over a treatise on melody, harmony and rhythm that took as its basis Hemsterhuis’s own comments on these topics from the *Lettre sur l’homme* (B 12.V73).

d) J. G. Forster

Georg Forster’s 1791 *Ansichten vom Niederrhein, von Brabant, Flandern, Holland, England und Frankreich* detailing his travel through the Dutch Republic in 1790 includes a panegyric to Hemsterhuis in the year of his death. He writes in a way that not only cements the ‘modern Plato’ trope in the Hemsterhuis-reception, but also approximates to the sorts of things Friedrich Schlegel will remark on Hemsterhuis’s writing style:

We found the elegant and learned Hemsterhuis—the Plato, not just of some academic phantom, but of our century as a whole—dying and could no longer visit him. If proof were still needed that fineness of sensation, richness and discernment in ideas, polish of taste, combined with the skill and insightfulness of genuine wit, along with the illuminated order of a sane philosophy, and the poetic adornment of an imagination that breathes life into everything, are not consigned to some

single region of earth, then a man like this would at least prove that the Dutch Republic is not excluded from the list of countries where the noblest powers and the most delicate sensibilities of human nature can attain the highest point in their development and bear the ripest fruits. The spirit that dwells in this weak body was so sensitive to harmonies of all kinds, and genuinely suffered so much from every imbalance in sensible as well as in moral nature, that he was not even able to employ his native dialect as a vehicle for his thoughts, but wrote all his works in French and, in so doing, as it were, transformed this language for his purposes by forcing his own style on it. His writings are less known among us than they deserve to be; but one must read them in the original language if one does not want to lose anything of their Attic elegance, which is often only an inimitable breath of life. (1791: 2.707)

Forster also took upon himself the distribution of Hemsterhuis's works, sending *Sophyle* and *Aristée* to the Swiss historian Johannes von Müller, who in turn wrote to Gallitzin that Hemsterhuis was (once more) 'the Plato of his age' (see Brummel 1925: 265). Müller, moreover, was not alone among Germanophone Swiss thinkers in appreciating Hemsterhuis—for example and unsurprisingly given his connections to Herder and Jacobi, J. K. Lavater was a reader of Hemsterhuis.

e) Christian Garve

The Leipzig-based Garve was the first person to publish on Hemsterhuis in German—in a 1771 review of the *Lettre sur la sculpture* for the *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künsten*. This review drew attention to Hemsterhuis's ideas at exactly the time at which Jacobi, Herder and Wieland—the 'first wave' of his German readers—were starting to encounter them. Moreover, extracts from this review were later included in Jansen's 1792 edition of Hemsterhuis's works, which was used by, among others, Günderrode, Hölderlin, the Schlegels and Novalis. Garve holds Hemsterhuis's account of beauty up to scrutiny against the rationalist canon of his day; for example, he writes:

It seems to us that it is not only by the quantity of visible points and by the velocity with which they are presented to sight that objects affect the eye and the soul of the spectator to a greater or lesser extent, as Hemsterhuis writes; rather, it also depends a lot on the property of these objects and their relation. We thus think that [beauty is found] not only in the drawing... in which [the soul] can link these visible points in the smallest space of time; but also in [the drawing] in which it can pursue these points in certain directions. That a line has only half or a third of the length of another, this can add nothing to the quantity or velocity of

the ideas; however, what one calls proportion depends entirely on [this property] and so too, to a large extent, does the pleasure we experience in seeing this object. (in Hemsterhuis 2015: 690)

f) J. W. Goethe

Whereas Hemsterhuis only began to read Goethe in the late 1780s (B 6.3), Goethe had been acquainted with the aesthetic theory presented in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur la sculpture* since the composition of *Von Deutscher Baukunst* in 1772-3 (see Fechner 1995), and, in 1781, gained access to a manuscript of the initial draft of *Simon* as well. In November 1784, Jacobi further gifted him copies of *Aristée*, *Sophyle* and the *Lettre sur l'homme* (see Trunz 1971: 22, 24), which were read alongside Spinoza's *Ethics* as part of Goethe's famous evening 'reading group' with Charlotte von Stein. Indeed, Goethe's use of the term 'Seelenführerin' to refer to von Stein in a letter from 9th November 1784 (sent to her along with a copy of *Alexis*) is a translation from *Aristée* that was subsequently taken up by Hölderlin (1887-1919: IV/7: 384), and it has even been suggested that the invocation of the golden age in Goethe's *Tasso* owes something to Hemsterhuis (Kurth-Voigt 1999: 168).

It is, however, after Hemsterhuis's death that Goethe's reception of Hemsterhuisian themes becomes most marked. In *Kampagne in Frankreich*, he relates a 1793 visit to Münster during which the recently deceased Hemsterhuis was a major talking point—with Goethe himself remembering him as someone 'led unwearily to strive after the intellectual and moral, as well as the actual and aesthetic.' (1849: 257; see further 1849: 253-4). As Trop describes in his essay below, Goethe uses the *Kampagne* to think through Hemsterhuis's definition of beauty and, more concretely still, Hemsterhuis's collection of gemstones, which 'were always at hand, as a delightful resource' (1849: 262). Goethe took the collection away, so 'that I might study it at home with my friends... [and] gain new insight into this important branch of the arts' (1849: 263; see Brummel 1925: 71-4) and he went on to formally catalogue its contents with Heinrich Meyer (in Trunz 1971: 176-86).

Goethe also took away from Münster Hemsterhuis's 1789 *Lettre sur l'optique*, and—as Petry has forcibly argued—this work was particularly influential. Petry contends that Goethe's conception of the *Farbenlehre* 'underwent a radical change' on reading Hemsterhuis: 'There can be little doubt that Hemsterhuis's work on optics contributed to this change in Goethe's basic approach to the phenomena of colour, and it is even possible that he precipitated it.' (Petry 1985: 233-4) In 1807 (in the wake of Gallitzin's death), Stolberg sent Goethe further manuscripts by Hemsterhuis,

including a mathematical treatise on divisibility, and, as late as January 1821, Goethe was still jotting down reflections in his *Tagebuch* on Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur la sculpture* (in relation to the neurological experiments of his acquaintance, J. E. Purkinje) (1887-1919: III / 8: 5).

g) J. G. Hamann

Hamann came to know of Hemsterhuis's writings on Herder's recommendation in 1773 (Herder 1977-2016: 2.287) and was quick to praise them (1955-75: 3.33, 3.357, 3.464), revelling particularly in Hemsterhuis's insistence on 'dialoguing in Platonic guise' (1955-75: 5.434) and dubbing him the 'Haagsche Socrates' (1955-75: 7.445). However, during the 1780s, Hamann's estimation of Hemsterhuis's philosophy soured (e.g., 1955-75: 7.340). The change in attitude crystallised during Hamann's 1787-8 stay in Münster, which gave Hamann access to Hemsterhuis's unpublished manuscripts (particularly *Alexis II* [1955-75: 7.501]) and which gave rise to a rivalry with Hemsterhuis for Gallitzin's esteem (see Gründer 1955: 80-8).

Despite what Hamann, as a Protestant, called his '*differentia specifica* from Diotima' (Hamann 1955-75: 7.477), he began to win over Gallitzin at Hemsterhuis's expense. Gallitzin writes:

For many days after [seeing Hamann] I could not endure Hemsterhuis's pompous Graecism at all. The childlike, sublime simplicity of the old Hamann enveloped me and Hemsterhuis was like one who wanted to wrest this holy spirit from me... It did not occur to the good man that Hamann (in his own way)... had taught me more about inner worth than Hemsterhuis's whole life and all his philosophical, even if beautiful writings (in Gründer 1955: 88; see Brachin 1952: 53-4).

Hamann died suddenly in Münster in June 1788, and, with some irony, Hemsterhuis took on the project of designing Hamann's gravestone and its inscription (see *B* 10.14, 10.17, 10.19).

h) G. W. F. Hegel

It is common among the scholarship (e.g., Henrich 1997: 122-3) to consider Hemsterhuis as a key reference point for Hegel and Hölderlin in their co-development of *Vereinigungsphilosophie* in Frankfurt during the mid-1790s. In Engelen's phrase, Hemsterhuis is 'an early precursor of *Vereinigungsphilosophie*' (1999: 119). While Hegel only mentions Hemsterhuis in the very restricted context of his essay on Hamann (2008: 49), leaving others to uncover 'traces' of his philosophy within the lectures on aesthetics (Engelen 1999: 120; see Melica 2007: 148-52), the early Hegel's focus on concepts of

love and unity are seemingly indebted in some way to Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur les désirs* as mediated through Herder and Boeck (see Melica 2007: 148).

i) J. G. Herder

Alongside Jacobi, Herder was the most avid 'Hemsterhuisian' of pre-romantic Germany. While there is some debate about whether Herder and Hemsterhuis first met during Herder's tour of the Dutch Republic in 1769 (Fresco in Hemsterhuis 2007: 255), Herder was certainly reading Hemsterhuis by 1770. Hemsterhuis is a constant reference point in Herder's correspondence during the early 1770s (e.g., 1977-2016: 2.16) and his writings are judged to contain 'an original philosophy, such as there is only once in a hundred years' (1977-2016: 3.127). More fully, Herder writes to Hamann:

He is to me more than Diderot as a philosopher and just as strong a mathematician and, among other things, there are Newtonian revelations on optics from his hand which have completely changed this science, even though he is no professor, but the first secretary of state in Holland and therefore an important man. To me this man seems as if we were together in Plato's original world (1977-2016: 3.287).

Or, as Herder also puts it elsewhere in correspondence, 'After Plato, Shaftesbury and Diderot, there are no philosophers so pleasant who understand so much and so deeply' (1977-2016: 3.35).

Herder was particularly taken with the *Lettre sur l'homme* on publication, writing that 'this book has a hundred of my favourite ideas' and 'everyone has said to me that I am very similar to this man' (1977-2016: 2.240) He, in fact, was involved in an unpublished translation of the work (see Trunz 1971: 235, Van Sluis 2022: 34), as well as including a long extract from it on the historical laws of knowledge in his 1780 *Briefe, das Studium der Theologie betreffend* (1877-1913: 11.125-9). However, it is above all the *Lettre sur les désirs* that determines Herder's thinking: in 1781 he translated it for *Der teutsche Merkur*, writing that 'perhaps since Plato there has been nothing so rich and finely thought on the nature of desire in the human soul' (1877-1913: 15.56) and appending a 'postscript', *Liebe und Selbstheit*, that adds a creative, if critical supplement to Hemsterhuis's text. Herder presents a neo-Platonic Hemsterhuis committed to a metaphysics of unification governing the whole of nature, such that the supreme moral ideal is monism—to which Herder himself reacts with a defence of the integrity of the individual (see Heinz 1995). After Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe*, no German publication was more influential on the Hemsterhuisianism of the subsequent generation of

German philosophers than Herder's 1781 contributions to *Der teutsche Merkur*.

Elsewhere, Hemsterhuis is cited in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1877-1913: 13.14); Bonchino, for one, insists on his influence over *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der menschlichen Seele* (2014: 36-41); and Herder's *Plastik* is written, in part, in critical conversation with the *Lettre sur la sculpture* (see Cirulli 2015: 66, Gaiger 2018: 226). After Hemsterhuis's death in 1793, Herder began to plan a 'Denkmal an Hemsterhuis' in collaboration with Jacobi (see Trunz 1971: 83).

j) Friedrich Hölderlin

Hölderlin possessed a copy of the 1782 Blankenburg translation of Hemsterhuis's works and borrowed the 1792 Jansen edition from his brother (1975-2008: 19.63). He also knew the Herder translation, had heard Boeck's teaching on Hemsterhuis, and Jacobi's presentation of an anti-Spinozist Hemsterhuis in the *Briefe* appears to have been particularly important for him (see Drees 1995: 535, Franz 2012: 81, Melica 2007: 150). As Drees (1995: 527) has argued, Hemsterhuis's 'Alexis played a constitutive role' in the composition of Hölderlin's *Hyperion*: the invocation of history as an 'exzentrische Bahn' in its *Thalia-Fragment* and *Vorletzten-Fassung* (1975-2008: 10.47, 10.276) reappropriates the very Keplerian language Hemsterhuis borrows in the *Lettre sur l'homme* and *Alexis*. Indeed, considering Hemsterhuis's position as a precursor of *Vereinigungsphilosophie* (see the 'Hegel' entry above), it is likely that Hemsterhuis lurks in the background whenever the early Hölderlin speaks of love, unity or the archaic.

k) Wilhelm von Humboldt

Hemsterhuis is occasionally noted as an influence on Humboldt's work of the early 1790s, especially essays like *Über den Geschlechtsunterschied und dessen Einfluss auf die organische Natur* (e.g., Bulle 1911: 40-1). However, Hemsterhuis's name is never cited by Humboldt and there is no direct evidence for such claims (see Moenkemeyer 1977: 511). Nevertheless, Humboldt's insistence at this period that everything in nature strives 'without exception' to 'unite into one whole' (1795: 311-2) may well be in part determined by Herder's reading of Hemsterhuis.

l) F. H. Jacobi

Jacobi long saw himself as Hemsterhuis's official representative in Germany, taking it upon himself to formally distribute his works to Lessing, Goethe and

others—and Hemsterhuis for one was grateful: ‘It is not just the celebrity I owe to you, but, what is worth more, the insight.’ (B 12.150) Jacobi’s engagement with Hemsterhuis is a long story (see Hammacher and Jaeschke in Jacobi 1998-: V/2.461-75, Whistler 2023a), beginning with an initial encounter in 1769¹⁰, passing through moments like Jacobi’s and Diderot’s conversations about Hemsterhuis in 1773, Jacobi’s first meeting with Hemsterhuis (arranged by Gallitzin) in February 1781, Jacobi’s aborted translation of *Simon* (devised in conversation with Goethe), Jacobi’s publication of *Alexis* in both its original French and his own translation in 1787, and culminating in his various uses of Hemsterhuisian philosophy in his polemical writings of the late 1780s. As Jacobi writes to Gallitzin in 1789, ‘Hemsterhuis certainly does not imagine how much I love him and how much I value him. Such a mixture of naivety and subtlety, as is in this man, is perhaps not to be found twice in nature.’ (1981-: I/8.196-7)

Jacobi frequently cites Hemsterhuis, particularly Hemsterhuis’s more effusive invocations of the epistemic value of sentiment and immediate sensation, in order to construct what might be called a ‘pietist’ image of Hemsterhuis. Yet, Jacobi’s reception is about far more than citation: in the *Spinoza-Briefe* Hemsterhuis’s philosophy functions as a key trigger setting off the conversations with Lessing alongside Goethe’s *Prometheus* (see ‘Lessing’ entry below); a fictionalised Hemsterhuis takes centre stage as a character in dialogue with a fictionalised Spinoza in the central doctrinal section of the work; and, of course, Hemsterhuis is also incorporated into the text as author with the inclusion of the *Lettre sur l’athéisme* in the 1789 edition. One of the most climactic moments in the drama of the *Spinoza-Briefe* is when Jacobi gives up on a rational refutation of Spinoza to throw himself into the arms of the Hemsterhuis of the *Aristée*:

At this point I leave Spinoza, impatient to throw myself into the arms of that sublime genius who said that the occasional occurrence in the soul of even one aspiration for the better, for the future and the perfect, is a better proof of the Divinity than any geometric proof. For some time, my attention has been directed with full force in this direction, which can be called the standpoint of faith. (1994: 214)

Jacobi’s very next work, *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen betreffend die Briefe über die Lehre des Spinoza*, will continue this lionisation of Hemsterhuis by placing a long passage from *Alexis* on prejudice on the very first page (1786: iii-iv).

¹⁰ Jacobi is in fact mentioned by Hemsterhuis in 1770 (B 12.V8), before disappearing from the correspondence for a decade.

m) Immanuel Kant

Whereas Hemsterhuis only began to familiarise himself with Kant's philosophy at the very end of his life (*B* 7.78, 8.20), Kant had a longstanding interest in Hemsterhuis's work—from 1770 onwards. Hamann testifies to Kant's 'enthusiasm for the whole series of dialogues' from *Sophyle* to *Alexis* (1955-75: 5.125) and elsewhere also mentions that *Alexis* 'was so admired by Kant' (1955-75: 7.255). It is also clear that Marcus Herz, Kant's student and correspondent, knew Hemsterhuis's philosophy well (Schüppen 1995: 588) and letters sent to Kant equally speak of Hemsterhuis in a way that presumes familiarity with him (e.g., 1999: 257). It is for this reason Petry, for example, has suggested, 'A thorough study of [Hemsterhuis's] influence upon the writing of the three *Critiques* would certainly be a worthwhile undertaking.' (1985: 217) The question of the relationship between Kant's philosophy and Hemsterhuis' philosophy also became something of a *Schwerpunkt* in German intellectual circles at the time—from C. G. Hermann's 1791 *Kant und Hemsterhuis in Rücksicht ihrer Definitionen der Schönheit* to the essay, *Einige Bemerkungen zur Vergleichung der Hemsterhuisischen Philosophie mit der kritischen*, included in the 1797 third volume of Blankenburg's *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, as well as in A. W. Schlegel's framing of Hemsterhuis 'as a prophet of transcendental idealism' or Schleiermacher's idea of Hemsterhuis as doing critical philosophy without knowing it (see below).

Among Kant's successors, W. G. Tennemann mentions Hemsterhuis in his various histories of philosophy (e.g., 1820: 455; see Schüppen 1995: 590), and, while J. G. Fichte is often cited as someone who shows no familiarity with Hemsterhuis's works (e.g., Moenkemeyer 1977: 512), like Kant, his correspondents write to him with a seeming presumption of familiarity with them; indeed, in a 1812 letter to Fichte, Ludwig Cölln nods in passing to Hemsterhuis's 'elegant' French, calling him 'the Plato of the moderns' (1962-2012: III / 7.172).

n) G. E. Lessing

Much of the critical discussion around Lessing's and Hemsterhuis's relationship has tended to focus on whether the *Laocoön* influenced the *Lettre sur la sculpture* (e.g., Brummel 1925: 112), which it presumably did not considering the latter was written, if not published, before the appearance of the former. In fact, Lessing was certainly aware of the *Lettre sur la sculpture* in the 1770s (at least), but had not encountered any other of Hemsterhuis's writings until Jacobi visited Wolfenbüttel in Summer 1780.

As Jacobi tells the story, on leaving Lessing's home on 10th July he presented him with the *Lettre sur l'homme*, *Sophyle*, and *Aristée*, later sending on the *Lettre sur les désirs*. Jacobi returns to Wolfenbüttel on 10th August,

On my return I found Lessing totally fascinated by just this *Aristée*, so much so that he had resolved to translate it himself. It was patent Spinozism, Lessing said, and in such a beautiful and exoteric a guise that this very guise contributed in turn to the development and the explication of the inner doctrine. (1994: 198)

Although Jacobi did not personally know Hemsterhuis at this point, he had still formed a robust interpretation of him as anti-Spinozist; Lessing, though, deciphers a crypto-Spinozist image of Hemsterhuis in the late dialogues. Thus, Jacobi reports Lessing as saying, 'In the letter *sur l'homme et ses rapports* there still is a bit of hesitation, and it is possible that Hemsterhuis did not at the time know his Spinozism fully yet; but now he is quite clear about it.' (1994: 198) In particular, Jacobi considers Lessing to be referring to a passage towards the end of *Aristée* in which Hemsterhuis discusses space as an attribute of God or as the medium of God's omnipresence (*EE* 2.92-3)—a claim that seems in many ways to mimic Spinoza discussion of the relation between extension and God in the scholium to *Ethics* IP15.

Lessing received the *Lettre sur les désirs* a few days later and became in turn enthusiastically taken with this text, writing to Jacobi on 4th December 1780 of how much 'the Hemsterhuisian system of love' resonated with his own thinking (in Jacobi 1981-: I/2.228). More generally, it does not seem farfetched to suggest that Lessing's output over the last months of his life may have been partially determined by this encounter with Hemsterhuis and, while it was too late for him to incorporate much into *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* which he was finishing during Jacobi's visits, it certainly seems possible that *Daß mehr als fünf Sinne für den Menschen sein können* does bear traces of Hemsterhuisian organology (following Brummel's conjecture in 1925: 128; see further Whistler 2023b).

o) Moses Mendelssohn

It is not clear how Hemsterhuis came to send his *Aristée* to Mendelssohn in 1782, but it does not seem to have been due to his new network of acquaintances in Germany. Mendelssohn's reply from April 1783 has not survived, but Hemsterhuis comments on it to Gallitzin as follows:

Here is a letter from the famous and amiable Mendelssohn... I'm annoyed that he did not finish his second demonstration, for I believe

that he would have realised that he is confounding time with eternal duration which is *one* and determinate space with infinite extension which is *one*. (B 4.33)

Whatever else one can discern from this comment, it seems likely that Mendelssohn's critique of *Aristée* focused on the same passage from the dialogue as Lessing's (see above) concerning extension as an attribute of God and its pantheistic implications. As Hammacher concludes, 'This shows that a monistic and more-or-less Spinozist interpretation of *Aristée* was universal in Germany' (2003: 24).

Before this exchange, Mendelssohn had also shown interest in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur la sculpture* in a series of unpublished notes that are, in Wellbery's estimation, 'a significant contribution to the project of a mathematical aesthetics' current in German rationalism (1984: 56). Mendelssohn attempts, that is, to formalise Hemsterhuis's definition of beauty into a kind of equation: 'Amount of good (m) multiplied by distinctness (p) over time (t) equals the quantity of the motive'. (in Wellbery 1984: 56-9; see Gaiger 2017: 241-4).

p) The Münster Circle

As narrated in §1 above, Hemsterhuis's primary line of access into Germany was through the Münster Circle which consisted, at various times during its existence from 1779 to around 1806, of Gallitzin, Fürstenberg, F. C. Buchholtz, J. F. Kleuker, B. H. Overberg, A. M. Sprickmann, F. L. Stolberg, etc. Letters and manuscripts sent to Gallitzin were immediately circulated around the group and formed the subject of discussion at Gallitzin's salon (Muller 1955: 37-8; see Goethe 1849: 260). Particularly important was Hemsterhuis's translation of Plato's *Symposium* which, in 1781, was adopted by the group as a template for philosophical practice (Oehlert 1955: 24-26), creating an image of Hemsterhuis as a Platonist and enthusiast which corresponds closely to Kant's later critique of their philosophical position in *Von einem neuerdings erhobenen vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie*.

As a Herder-enthusiast and Plato-translator, Kleuker was a significant mediator of Hemsterhuis's thought. With Herder and Dalberg, he formed a triumvirate of philosophers prior to 1790 who associated Hemsterhuis with speculative forms of Neoplatonism, including the Cambridge Platonists and Shaftesbury, and – in Kleuker's specific case – even with Saint Martinian theosophy, Kabbala and Orphic hermeticism (see Bonchino 2014: 47-53, Vieillard-Baron 1988: 91-113). For example, in Kleuker's *Magikon*, the Hemsterhuisian golden age is identified with a perennial, but hidden wisdom.

q) A. W. Rehberg

Rehberg had close familial ties to the Schlegels, but a very different philosophical temperament which drew him towards a conservative critique of ‘Jacobin’ radicalism. Nonetheless, he shared with the Schlegels their appreciation for Hemsterhuis, making use of *Aristée* in the 1787 *Über das Verhältniss der Metaphysik zu der Religion* (see Trunz 1971: 281) and even more explicitly calling Hemsterhuis, in a note to the 1785 *Philosophische Gespräche über Vergnügen*, ‘a writer whose works surpass everything that has ever been thought and written on this topic [of desire], even those of Plato, and to whom his century fails to do justice.’ (1785: 30; see Brummel 1925: 264-5)

r) Friedrich Schiller

Like Fichte (see the ‘Kant’ entry above), Schiller is often cited as a German thinker with no interest in Hemsterhuis’s philosophy (Moenkemeyer 1975: 167). Nevertheless, this seems implausible. Bulle (1911: 42-4; see Regin 1965: 66) provides some suggestions for passages that show the implicit imprint of Hemsterhuisian thought. One might also cite Schiller’s use of mythological narrative in his poems—such as the descent of Venus Urania in the creation-story provided in the 1788/9 *Die Künstler*—which is strongly reminiscent of the mythological stories told in *Alexis* and *Simon*.

s) Ludwig K. von Schrautenbach

A friend of Merck’s (see below) with pietist leanings, Schrautenbach was charged, under Merck’s editorship, to write notices of Hemsterhuis’s *Lettre sur les désirs* and *Lettre sur l’homme* in 1772 for the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* (reproduced on pp. 321-38 below—see the introduction, pp. 321-3 below, for more biographical and contextual details). These notices, which were long misattributed to Herder and appeared alongside work by Goethe, consist, in Schrautenbach’s own words, of ‘extensive excerpts’ from Hemsterhuis’s texts—enthusiastic paraphrases intended to instigate a wider dissemination of his ideas in Germany, and, to this end, they explicitly position themselves as continuing the work begun in Garve’s review of the *Lettre sur la sculpture* in 1771. Schrautenbach’s interest in Hemsterhuis was, in fact, longstanding (and he even managed to obtain a rare manuscript of *Simon* in the early 1780s), and, in general, he seems to have benefited from a system of patronage established by Hemsterhuis (and functioning relatively independently of Gallitzin’s mediation), in which his writings were distributed to foreign dignitaries (in Schrautenbach’s case, the Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt), who he had initially met at The Hague, with the expectation

that they would further circulate them among interested readers attached to their courts.

t) C. M. Wieland, J. H. Merck and Sophie La Roche

While Garve, Herder and Jacobi presented themselves as relatively isolated in their discovery of Hemsterhuis's ideas at the beginning of the 1770s, at the same period a more communal appreciation of Hemsterhuis's philosophy emerged. This network of Hemsterhuisian readers came into existence in around 1771 and comprised Wieland, Merck and La Roche. Wieland himself seems to have begun reading Hemsterhuis in the 1760s when composing *Aspasia* (see Ermatinger 1907: 150), but Hemsterhuis comes to be a specific point of reference at the end of 1771. Merck writes to La Roche on 31st December 1771 (in the earliest German criticism of Hemsterhuis):

I'm pleased Wieland has finally come back from his admiration for the Hemsterhuisian hypothesis. It couldn't last long, for the idea was always utterly wrong to me... If the soul finds its highest pleasure in the perception of the maximum of ideas in the shortest space of time, such as at the sight of a statue – why does this soul afterwards, so to speak, close its eyes and feel with its hand for the intimate impression of each individual beauty which forms part of the admired object? And if [the soul] has exhausted everything [in this highest pleasure], why does it become disgusted with pleasure, and why does it thirst once more for a succession of other ideas? (1968: 60-1; see Fechner 1995: 513-5)

La Roche and Merck both went on to later visit Hemsterhuis (in 1776 and 1784/5, respectively) and, as well as editing Schrautenbach's notices (see above), Merck was a key mediator in circulating a manuscript of *Simon* at the beginning of the 1780s. A few years later in August 1787, after finally meeting Wieland in Weimar, Hemsterhuis further sent Wieland a copy of *Alexis* (Starnes 1987: 2: 109). It is probably due to Wieland's influence that the novelist Wilhelm Heinse came to know of Hemsterhuis, even if his attitude remained more critical (see Moenkemeyer 1975: 127-9). At the end of the century, Wieland and Hemsterhuis remain linked in the German imagination, as evidenced in the anonymous 1796 article, 'Die Liebe, betrachtet nach Pope, Wieland, Fielding und Hemsterhuis' which appeared in the *Berlinisches Archiv der Zeit und ihres Geschmacks* and reads them both through the lens of Herder's *Liebe und Selbstheit*.

u) J. J. Winckelmann

Despite their obvious affinities, Winckelmann is not a thinker influenced by Hemsterhuis: his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* appeared in 1764 prior to the *Lettre sur la sculpture*. However, Winckelmann is relevant precisely because of the ways in which his works prepare the way for Hemsterhuis's German-reception. Van Bunge helpfully notes that, through his philhellenism, his philological approach to antique art and his emphasis on simplicity in artistic composition, 'it was Winckelmann who must have been largely responsible for creating a German audience for Hemsterhuis' (2018: 185).

3. Hemsterhuis in Romanticism

It was as part of this wider movement that a new 'romantic' generation of Hemsterhuis-readers emerged in the 1790s in Jena and beyond. In what follows, I want to again provide the bare bones of an intellectual history of these readings (this time proceeding in roughly chronological order) that will be filled out by the essays below.

One difference that marks the generation of the 1790s apart from earlier readers of Hemsterhuis is that, while the latter often had a personal connection with the Dutch philosopher or his circle and accessed his works through the circulation of unpublished and rare manuscripts, the romantics did not need to rely on these contingencies and had a different mode of access to his texts. In 1782, C. F. Blankenburg had published an unauthorised German translation of Hemsterhuis's writings, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, excluding *Alexis* and the not-yet-written *Lettre sur l'athéisme*, but including the as-yet-unpublished *Simon* (see van Sluis in Hemsterhuis 2015: 54-61). A third volume was added to Blankenburg's edition in 1797 (after his death) which further includes *Alexis* and some material from Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe*. Further German translations included Jacobi's 1787 authorised version of *Alexis*—vociferously praised by Hemsterhuis (B 12.224)—and Herder's 1781 translation of the *Lettre sur les désirs* (singularised in the German into *Brief über das Verlangen*), which went on to be included in both the Blankenburg and Jansen editions.¹¹ By the 1790s, many philosophers owned copies of Blankenburg's edition, but were still

¹¹ There were a number of unfinished and unpublished German translations in circulation during the period, including (not exhaustively) H. C. Bois's plan to translate some of the early letters, Herder's involvement in plans for a translation of the *Lettre sur l'homme*, a further translation of it by Georg Ernst von Rülting, Jacobi's aborted translation of *Simon* (although he did complete a version of Diotima's speech in that dialogue), Sprickmann's translation of *Simon* in Münster and two versions of *Aristée*, one completed in Münster in November 1782 and one by M. W. Müller, also from 1782.

keen to get hold of H. J. Jansen's newly-appeared 1792 French edition of Hemsterhuis's complete works (*Œuvres philosophiques*), which included the first original-language publication of *Simon*, along with a version of the *Lettre sur l'athéisme* that had (along with *Alexis*) been supplied by Jacobi in manuscript form. As a result, among Novalis, Hölderlin and the Schlegels, there is a tendency to prefer the Jansen-edition.

a) A.W. Schlegel

Schlegel was, as in many areas, the first of the romantics to appreciate Hemsterhuis's value, mentioning him in print as early as 1790 (see Cahen-Maurel 2022: 39). As he put it in 1795, Hemsterhuis had long been 'our darling' (1964: 1.155-6). Moreover, his value for Schlegel can be quite precisely defined as a forerunner of the Kantian Copernican revolution that he saw culminating in the *poietic* philosophy of Jena:

Hemsterhuis (a Dutchman, who wrote in French but was only properly esteemed by Germans) who, so familiar with the culture of the Encyclopaedists, accordingly dared to take the rights of speculation, ethics, art and religion from them and link himself to forms of antiquity, is considered as a precursor of ever-growing philosophy, as it were a prophet of transcendental idealism. (1964: 3.83)

In so claiming, Schlegel inaugurated a tradition of reading Hemsterhuis as a 'precursor' according to a logic of anticipation (as well as buying into a pre-existing tradition of pairing Hemsterhuis with Kant). Through his influence on Germaine de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*, this motif entered nineteenth-century France: for de Staël, Hemsterhuis was 'the first who, in the middle of the eighteenth century, indicated in his writings the majority of the beneficent ideas on which the new German school is founded' (1814: 432), and, a few decades later, Émile Grucker will still dub Hemsterhuis 'Kant's precursor' (1866: 264).

Hemsterhuis's philosophy plays a number of roles in Schlegel's lecture courses—in their philosophy of history (as explored by Galletta in her essay below), with Schlegel praising 'Hemsterhuis's very ingenious description of the rise and fall of culture as an elliptical cycle' (1964: 2.17, 3.78); in their definition of beauty (1964: 2.122) and understanding of sculpture (1964: 3.78, 2.111, 2.125); in their remarks on the origin of language drawn from the *Lettre sur l'homme* (1964: 1.155-6); in their paligenetic thesis that death is a 'natural development of one's essence' (1964: 1.38); and in their account of the origins of music (1964: 1.166, 2.209-10), the success of which is due,

according to Schlegel, to the fact that ‘Hemsterhuis found a way through the labyrinth of physiology and psychology’ (1964: 1.167).

b) Friedrich Schlegel

In late 1792 through to Spring 1793, Schlegel wrote frequently to his brother for information about editions of Hemsterhuis’s writings (1958-2002: 23.122; 23.134-35, 23.152). By 16th October 1793, he could finally report, ‘I am now familiar with all the known pieces by Hemsterhuis, except only one, the *description philosophique du caractere de feu Mr Fagel*.’ (1958-2002: 23.140). These readings formed the basis for Schlegel’s rich, if fragmentary reception of Hemsterhuis during the 1790s. References to Hemsterhuis are scattered through the notebooks and publications and can be organised into three broad groupings: Hemsterhuis’s imitation of Plato and Socrates; his experiments in philosophical style; and what might be dubbed his prophetic moralism.

On the first point, Schlegel stands in the tradition of using Plato and Socrates as a hermeneutic frame for Hemsterhuis, characterising him as ‘the only genuine Socratic of his age.’ (1958-2002: 18.6) and ‘still the best’ of all modern imitators of Plato (1958-2002: 11.119)—with Schlegel noting in particular Hemsterhuis’s ‘Socratic philosophy of nature’ (1958-2002: 18.79) and ‘classical’ conception of irony (1958-2002: 2.160, 18.223). Indeed, according to Schlegel, Hemsterhuis saw ‘how to beautifully limit modern breadth through antique simplicity, and from the heights of his *Bildung*... he gazed simultaneously into the old and into the new worlds.’ (1958-2002: 2.211) This idea that Hemsterhuis synthesised the ancient and the modern comes most prominently to the fore in comments on ‘Hemsterhuis mediating Plato and Spinoza’ (1958-2002: 18.277) and anticipating ‘some intimations of realism of poetry’ by identifying Plato with ‘moral ideas’ and Spinoza with ‘poetry’, ‘in order to newly revive Greek mythology.’ (1958-2002: 16.270)

Hemsterhuis’s Socratism is clearest, Schlegel further argues, in how he writes philosophy, and, for this reason, Schlegel for the most part neglects Hemsterhuis’s early letters, including the definition of beauty in the *Lettre sur la sculpture* which had been so important in the earlier reception-history, to attend to the more stylistically experimental dialogues, especially *Simon*. Schlegel writes:

Hemsterhuis speaks of a philosophy which is similar to the dithyramb [at the end of *Simon*]. What does he understand by this but the freest outpouring of ethical feeling, a communication of great and good sentiments? I would like to call the *Simon* of this philosopher a Socratic

poetry. To me the ordering of the whole appears at the very least neither didactic, nor dramatic, but dithyrambic. (1958-2002: 1.244)

Schlegel continues a year later, ‘Hemsterhuis unites Plato’s beautiful visionary flights with the strict rigour of the systematiser... Hemsterhuis’s works might be called intellectual poetry.’ (1958-2002: 2.187) Elsewhere, Schlegel will praise Hemsterhuis’ ‘scientific rigour and brevity of expression united with clarity, life and grace, even with an often-Platonic beauty of style’ (1958-2002: 3.271) and considers his French composed

so beautifully and harmoniously, without constraint and with the grace of the ancients, that, even from this perspective, his Socratic conversations correspond to the genuinely Platonic and philosophically Christian spirit which forms their content. (1958-2002: 6.346)

Schlegel also stresses the didactic nature of Hemsterhuis’s project—the fact that it poeticises in order to persuade. In this vein, Schlegel writes that ‘Hemsterhuis has morally combined poetry and philosophy’ (1958-2002: 18.286), or again that ‘Hemsterhuis’s aesthetics is moral-philosophical and his morals are thoroughly aesthetic.’ (1958-2002: 18.116). And this reading of Hemsterhuis is closely connected to Schlegel’s appreciation of the eschatological dimension of this ethical theory (which will come to the fore in Novalis’s reception). The key claim Schlegel makes thematises the organological tendency in Hemsterhuis’s thought to unlock future ‘spiritual’ organs through self-cultivation and prophetic practices: ‘Exceptional is Hemsterhuis’s opinion that there could be very many completely new and unknown senses—as if more completely world-encompassing senses were possible than the sense of space and time’ (1958-2002: 18.550).

c) Novalis

Novalis’s interpretation marks the culmination of the German Hemsterhuis-reception. He began reading Hemsterhuis in 1791 at the latest and in January 1792 met Friedrich Schlegel for the first time, who immediately reported to A. W. Schlegel that Novalis’s ‘favourite writers are Plato and Hemsterhuis’ (F. Schlegel 1958-2002: 23.40). However, it was between 5th September and 30th November 1797 that Novalis’s reading of Hemsterhuis became intense: during this period, he borrowed the 1792 Jansen edition of Hemsterhuis’s works (in addition to the Blankenburg edition he already owned) (Mähl in Novalis 1960-2006: 2.318) and took notes on each of Hemsterhuis’s works in turn. Generally, in Mähl’s words, in these studies the ‘boundary’ between Hemsterhuis’s and Novalis’s thoughts is ‘not always sharply drawn’ (Mähl in

Novalis 1960-2006: 2.322): there is a bleeding of one into the other. The result was 36 sheets of translations, notes and occasional commentary that have come to be known as the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* (translated below in this special issue by James Reid for the first time in English).¹² Novalis also consulted Herder's 1781 *Liebe und Selbstheit*, which is included in both the Jansen and Blankenburg editions. The only major piece by Hemsterhuis not included is *Sophyle* (although Novalis was familiar with the dialogue) and the *Studien* also continue the romantic trajectory of minimising the importance of the *Lettre sur la sculpture* (it is accorded just three one-line entries among the 36 pages) (p. 344 below). The *Studien* emphasise an array of Hemsterhuisian ideas, including Hemsterhuis's political genealogies, his account of language and his theory of poetic genius; but most relevant to the essays in the dossier below are Novalis's development of Hemsterhuisian organs and the moral arts.

When it comes to the organic (in its etymological sense of 'tool-being'), Novalis is keen to take from Hemsterhuis the idea that the framework of the organ can helpfully make sense of all that the human, as finite, does or undergoes; as he bluntly paraphrases Hemsterhuis, 'Every finite being is an instrument' (p. 356 below). He also stresses the related idea that organs separate us from the world and each other and so generate an infinite striving towards immediacy, which becomes broadly Fichtean in Novalis's account ('Without organs, the soul would be permeated by the infinite object in the instant – both would become one – and the mutual enjoyment would be complete' [p. 345 below]). He also considers significant Hemsterhuis's account of the interrelation of organs or what he calls 'the sympathy of the organs' (p. 351 below), the fact that each capacity of the mind is a kind of organ, such as the 'organ of faith' (p. 352 below), and that thinking is fundamentally organological and relational: '*Understanding* and *reason* express the organs or faculties for relationships' (p. 349 below). Most importantly, Novalis describes in great detail the various practices, faculties and forms of thinking required for the cultivation of new organs—he exclaims, '*Germes of future organs* – perfectibility of the organs. How can something be made into an organ?' (p. 354 below) As Moenkemeyer sums up, Novalis appreciated in Hemsterhuis 'the perfectibility of our present organs and the possibility of some still undeveloped organs in man' (1975: 82). Two recent commentaries have picked up on precisely these aspects of Novalis's Hemsterhuis-reception. First, Leif Weatherby demonstrates that Novalis inherits from

¹² He also reports on this study-programme to A. W. Schlegel in a series of letters from November and December 1797 (1960-2006: 4.237, 4.239).

Hemsterhuis, among others, a ‘new approach to speculation called organology’ (2016: 210), according to which the future is always open, contingent and malleable. This is, in part, what Novalis means by magical idealism, the construction of an ‘all-capable organ in philosophy’ (1960-2006: 3.417). Secondly, Dalia Nassar has pointed to the communal, intersubjective character of this organic ontology shared by Novalis and Hemsterhuis. She writes, ‘What Novalis finds in Hemsterhuis, and what he could not find in Fichte, was a way to think of the relational character of the self—in a political and moral context, and in a scientific context... Through Hemsterhuis, it seems, Novalis begins to develop a communal consciousness.’ (2013: 41) Mitchell takes up these themes in his essay below.

When it comes to the cultivation of moral sense, one of Novalis’s key claims in the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* is as follows: ‘Pythagoras’s unconditioned end of the perfection of the moral organ. *Are there no binoculars for the same?*’ (p. 352 below) The first sentence is taken from Hemsterhuis’s *Lettre sur l’homme* and the second is his own way of bringing out the technological implications of a moral organ in need of amelioration. Novalis continues, ‘Do we know—what discoveries have been reserved for us on this side—? The moral side of the cosmos is even more unknown and immeasurable than the space of heaven. *Moral Arts.*’ (p. 355 below) Novalis places emphasis on the activities and technologies of the subject in generating a morally appropriate relation to others—and, when pushed to its extreme, this cultivation of moral sensitivity comes to be articulated in a prophetic key: ‘There are human beings so tenderly moral, whose conscience perceives such remote relations that they cannot be members of current society.’ (p. 351 below) As Novalis puts it elsewhere, ‘Hemsterhuis’s expectations of the moral organ are genuinely prophetic.’ (1960-2006: 2.562) At stake is Novalis’s appropriation of the Hemsterhuisian imperative to set about enhancing the moral organ which had become so neglected in modernity:

The arts have indeed arisen through the excessive expansion and development of the lower faculties—but the most essential organ—the heart, has been lost? The development of this organ is reserved for a future existence—the development of this organ is the character of our genuine perfectibility. (p. 355 below)

Implicit in the above is Novalis’s description of the pull felt by a principle of perfectibility towards new, higher existences—a thesis he makes explicit in the following, ‘There are wishes and desires—that are so poorly fitted to the state of our earthly life that we can safely infer a state where they become

pinions that will elevate them into an element of their own, and an island where they can settle.’ (p. 360 below)

Hemsterhuis’s influence on Novalis evidently extends outside of the 1797 *Hemsterhuis-Studien* too. Alongside Novalis’s interest in the figure of the golden age and Hemsterhuis’s philosophy of history generally (see Mähl 1994), particularly visible once more is the various ways Novalis puts to work Hemsterhuis’s concept of a moral organ. What Hemsterhuis offers Novalis is a ‘new treatment of morality’ (1960-2006: 3.561), a ‘philosophical ethics’ and ‘poetic ethics’ of the ‘moral sense’ that emphasises ‘perfectibility’ and the ‘infinite’ (1960-2006: 3. 420). As Chepurin describes in his essay below, Novalis is very keen to explore the cosmic and planetary discourse around morality in Hemsterhuis, whether by reappropriating *Alexis*’s account of the disruption caused by the moon (1960-2006: 3. 64; see Moenkemeyer 1975: 174), or by recasting philosophy of nature in a Hemsterhuisian key. On the latter point, he speaks of a ‘holy way to physics’ (1960-2006: 3.469), or more precisely to A. W. Schlegel in July 1798 of ‘a *moral* (in the Hemsterhuisian sense) astronomy’ and ‘religion of the visible world’ in which physics becomes ‘absolutely *symbolic*’ (1960-2006: 4.255; see Tokarzewska 2015, Flickenschild 2010). This ‘moralising’ of the philosophical project via Hemsterhuis is equally present in the *Allgemeine Brouillon*, where Novalis notes that ‘encyclopedics’ emerges ‘according to Hemsterhuis, through the application of the moral sense to the other senses—i.e., through the moralising of the world and the other sciences.’ (1960-2006: 3.275) This is precisely the strand of Novalis’s Hemsterhuis-reception that Napoli explores in his essay below.

d) F. W. J. Schelling

Schelling’s Hemsterhuis-reception follows a number of the trajectories described above: his interest can be traced back to both the Tübingen Hemsterhuis of Boeck, later crystallised in Hegel’s and Hölderlin’s *Vereinigungsphilosophie*, and also to the Jena romantic group. It has even been claimed that it was Novalis who personally (re-)introduced Schelling to Hemsterhuis (Franz 2012: 82). Schelling’s cousin, C. G. Bardili, might also have contributed to this story with his 1794 dialogue, *Sophylus oder Sittlichkeit und Natur als Fundamente der Weltweisheit* (even if it does not mention Hemsterhuis by name). And one further influence was Baader’s *Über das pythagoräische Quadrat in der Natur*: its misattribution to Hemsterhuis of the claim that matter is ‘coagulated spirit’ was repeated in the 1800 *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* (1856-61: 3.453), which—in light of his mistake—

provoked further reflection in Schelling's late Berlin lectures (1856-61: 11.425), as explored by Zorrilla's essay below.

Hemsterhuis's *Alexis* is also cited at a crucial point in the last of Schelling's 1802 *Fernere Darstellungen der Philosophie*. He writes, 'Hemsterhuis's beautiful poem on the end of the golden age is well-known: he looks for the ground of the altered inclination of the earth's area in a necessary effect of the moon which he considers as a later newcomer to the earth. We are of the opinion that this idea approaches the truth to a considerable degree more than any of the others.' He continues that such a theory 'chimes with the old tradition illuminated in the myth of Arcadia, which is also mentioned by Hemsterhuis.' (1856-61: 4.490) It is also probable that Hemsterhuis was a source for some of the material in Schelling's lectures on the philosophy of art (given in 1802/03 and then 1803/04) (see, e.g., Tilliette 1970: 1.439, 1.455), particularly considering Schelling's reliance in drafting them on A. W. Schlegel's 1801 *Vorlesungen über schöne Litteratur und Kunst* which makes so much of Hemsterhuis.¹³

e) F. D. E. Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher is another Hemsterhuis-reader on the fringes of early Romanticism, and, if nothing else, his role as editor and translator of the Platonic corpus led to familiarity with Hemsterhuis's work. As Vieillard-Baron puts it,

The decisive impulse that Hemsterhuis gave to the return and recourse to Plato did not solely influence original thinkers like Hamann or Jacobi. It also stimulated Platonic studies, in particular translations of the dialogues. The three most important translators of the time, Kleuker, Stolberg and Schleiermacher, recognised their debt to the Dutch philosopher. (1988: 191)

The young Schleiermacher had been familiar with Hemsterhuis from 1790 (on his father's recommendation), studied both Herder's postscript to the *Lettre sur les désirs, Liebe und Selbstheit*, and Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe* (see Grove 2011), although by 1801 he was pointing out to Friedrich Schlegel that Hemsterhuis was not as good a dialogist as first thought (1860-1: 3.258). In his posthumously published *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Schleiermacher makes his most significant passing comment on Hemsterhuis—concluding a discussion of the infinitude of the attributes in Spinoza's philosophy as seemingly 'quite close to critical idealism' with the following, 'What

¹³ Caroline Schelling also, unsurprisingly, owned Hemsterhuis's works (2015: 2.319).

Hemsterhuis and, along with him, Jacobi say on different viewpoints on the world according to the receptivity of the philosophising organ also belongs here; on this point, they are both very close to critical idealism, without knowing it.’ (1839: 300-1; see Hammacher 1995a: 415). More generally, it seems possible that the pietist image of Hemsterhuis transmitted by Jacobi may well have had some formative role in Schleiermacher’s understanding of the self as constituted through a feeling of dependence (see Bulle 1911: 27-8, 54, Kraetke 1995: 545-8).

f) Karoline von Günderrode and Bettina von Arnim

A further study of Hemsterhuis’s philosophy is to be found in Günderrode’s notebooks, alongside notes on Kant, Fichte and Novalis. Having borrowed the Jansen edition from von Arnim, she reproduces an extract from the opening of the Prometheus-myth in *Simon* followed by her own free translation of the section setting out Hemsterhuis’s faculty psychology. Following Hemsterhuis, she notes, for example, that ‘the power of will is neither medium nor organ, but it is the ground of activity’, that intellect becomes reason as soon as it develops the capacity to compare and contrast ideas, and that ‘the moral organ has two instincts’, one in which it is ‘passive’ and ‘receives impressions of love, hate, envy, desire, sympathy, anger, etc.’ and the other in which it is ‘active’ and ‘judges, compares, stimulates, or pacifies sensations’. (1990: 2.299-301)

Hemsterhuis also plays a significant role in von Arnim’s dramatization of her friendship with Günderrode and both women are pictured studying his philosophy. Additionally, an ‘accompanying philosophical essay’ found in an edition of Hemsterhuis is reproduced in *Die Günderrode* extolling faith as an epistemic virtue that reconciles time and eternity (1842: 13, 21), and von Arnim also presents herself reading his works aloud to her grandmother, Sophie La Roche (see above) (1842: 93). More widely, Hemsterhuis’s influence has been discerned in Günderrode’s poems—for example, in the 1804 *Mahomets Traum in der Wüste* (see Christmann 2005: 176, Ezekiel 2021, Schüppen 1995: 592-3).

g) Jean Paul

Independently of the Jena circle, Jean Paul also developed a broadly romantic interpretation of Hemsterhuis’s philosophy. ‘Strong Hemsterhuisian overtones’ (Cometa 2005: 121) are present as early as the 1791 *Über die Fortdauer der Seele und ihres Bewusstseins* with its organological claims about the emergence of new ways of perceiving and thinking, and are then further

advanced in the 1795 *Hesperus*. Most significant, however, is Jean Paul's commentary on Hemsterhuis's philosophy in the 1804 *Vorschule der Aesthetik*.

Here Jean Paul interrogates the definition of beauty given in the *Lettre sur la sculpture*: 'Beauty, says Hemsterhuis, is what yields the greatest number of ideas in the least time, an explanation which borders both on the older "sensuous unity in multiplicity" and on the later "free play of the imagination".' The reference to Kant is once again important. However, Jean Paul continues, what Hemsterhuis's definition presupposes is 'how ideas can be measured by time at all', and this, in his estimation, leads to two difficulties: first, Hemsterhuis's definition is so formal that it could equally apply to ugliness, and, secondly, aesthetic experiences actually look very different from this speedy apprehension and instead involve zigzagging and oscillation, as opposed to 'a numbing multiplicity of ideas' (1973: 24).

The *Vorschule* also discusses Hemsterhuis in another context—as an ally against the 'stylicists' who destroy art by analysing it. On the contrary, Hemsterhuis is a holist, someone to whom 'the poetic soul shows itself... only to the whole body, not in the single toes and fingers it animates'. Jean Paul continues, 'There can be philosophic works, like some by Hemsterhuis and Lessing, which inspire us with philosophical spirit without disposing their matter in separate philosophical paragraphs.' (1973: 42) Hemsterhuis, Jean Paul had already insisted, was 'the creator of a philosophical world' (1973: 33).

4. Hemsterhuis alongside the Romantics

The above tells the story—in a relatively cursory manner—of Hemsterhuis's reception history *from the German side*, as it were, cataloguing uses of his name and his concepts from 1771 into the early nineteenth century. However, such an approach immediately comes up against a significant body of literature in Hemsterhuis scholarship which takes it to be unhelpful, even harmful. That is, obsession with Hemsterhuis's German legacy has come to be considered misguided—concealing, distorting and generally falsifying Hemsterhuis's actual philosophical significance; and, as a result, Hemsterhuis scholarship has been keen on giving the other side of the story, i.e., both describing Hemsterhuis's ideas outside of this German context and also charting the ways in which the German reception gets them wrong.

This is clearest in Klaus Hammacher's commentary which splits Hemsterhuis's German reception-history in two: Jacobi, on the one hand, 'gets' Hemsterhuis; the later romantic generation, on the other hand, does not (1995a: 412-3), for it does not take seriously the Dutch Newtonian and

late Cartesian resonances to his concepts. Hence, because Jacobi had studied 's Gravesande's Dutch Newtonianism as a student in Geneva, he retained a live connection with the original context to Hemsterhuis's thought; however, by Novalis's time, this connection had been lost. As such, Hammacher accuses Novalis of grasping Hemsterhuis's ideas 'purely metaphorically and poetically' and 'reducing them to an anthropological dimension', thereby losing their scientific and experimental meanings (1995a: 418, 429-30). Melica (2023) goes even further: criticising the 'deformations' and 'divergences' at play in even Jacobi's reception of Hemsterhuis: the *Lettre sur l'athéisme* is very literally, she shows, tampered with by Jacobi in order to make it better fit into a German context.

This feeds into a more general concern within Hemsterhuis scholarship concerning the ways in which Hemsterhuis's philosophy has come to be lost beneath its German reception. The fame of his influence on the romantics has led to bad interpretations, since—following the tradition inaugurated by A. W. Schlegel—Hemsterhuis is reduced to the position of precursor and his philosophy is interpreted solely in light of what is to come. German romanticism becomes, on this view, a distorting prism. Hence, Petry, for example, worries that the romantic interpretation of Hemsterhuis fails to acknowledge that 'his preoccupation with sensibility and aesthetic experience was only one aspect of his philosophy as a whole' (1985: 211-2) and Pelckmans rails against the 'literature of anticipation' (1987: 11) engendered by an obsession with Hemsterhuis's German legacy. To read Hemsterhuis's philosophy through its German legacy is to deform it.

And yet, there is obviously something slightly odd about this counter-obsession with fidelity to an 'original Hemsterhuis'. No reception history should be in thrall to categories of accuracy, or even those of distortion, perversion and fulfilment; instead, the task is surely to celebrate the perpetual mutations born of intellectual appropriations, affiliations and contestations across borders. As Michael Werner has put it in a different context, what we should be interested in are 'currents of thought which have passed from one cultural space to another with all the sometimes instructive deformations that this type of phenomenon can engender.' (1985: 278) In this vein, it seems clear—to me, at least—that the Jacobian image of Hemsterhuis or the Schlegelian image of Hemsterhuis furnishes as much material for thought as any original philosophical event named 'Hemsterhuis'. Each mutation sits alongside the 'original' as one more historical singularity to be enjoyed, consumed and digested. Whether Novalis was faithful to the Hemsterhuis of the 1760s or not, what matters is the conceptual work the Novalisian Hemsterhuis achieves, the problems he is invented to solve.

In fact, one can be more radical still, and this is precisely where most of the essays that follow are to be positioned. Just as one can leave behind any question of fidelity to the ‘original’ Hemsterhuis, so too one can leave behind questions of fidelity to the Novalisian Hemsterhuis or the Schlegelian Hemsterhuis, etc., to perform *contemporary acts of romanticisation on Hemsterhuis’s philosophy*. This is what the essays that follow have in common: they make use of the German Hemsterhuis-reception as a basis which they then go beyond—beyond the various historically-instantiated romantic Hemsterhuises to a romanticised Hemsterhuis invented from the present. Hemsterhuis is constructed anew in each essay below *as romantic*. That is, the essays that follow for the most part do away with the problematic of influence to look instead to the virtual Hemsterhuisian thinking that can *sit alongside* the romantic projects of 1790s and 1800s Germany, that can supplement them, complement them and diverge from them.

And in the final part of my introduction to the dossier I want to give a brief sense of some of the significant ways in which ‘Hemsterhuis’ can be constructed retrospectively as romantic from the present. This is to deliberately ignore how influential particular doctrines like his definition of beauty or his use of dialogue-form was to individual romantic thinkers, as well as to pass beyond those texts that romantic philosophers actually knew to Hemsterhuis’s correspondence and unpublished fragments where he is at his most adventurous, most liberated and most speculative. And it is on this basis that I want to start sketching—in a way that anticipates the essays to come—some of the programmatic gestures of a Hemsterhuis who rivals the Schlegels, Schelling or G nderrode, a Hemsterhuis who is the virtual double of the romantics, whose potentialities are monuments to an as-yet-unthought romanticism.¹⁴

5. Absolute Coexistence and the Weaponisation of the Past

In the *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, G. W. F. Hegel commits himself to a hyper-presentism in which philosophy is identified with ‘its own time apprehended in thoughts’. This stance leads him directly to criticise those philosophers who make productive use of anachronism in a way that reads as a precise rebuttal of Hemsterhuis’s philosophical attitude: ‘It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes’ (2008:

¹⁴ Much of the material below is summarised from my book, *Fran ois Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (2022a), which makes similar arguments, but from a position much more ‘faithful’ to the ‘original’ Hemsterhuis.

15). On the contrary, Hemsterhuis—who insists again and again on being ‘born Greek’ (e.g., *B* 3.61), on the need to speak Greek like a native and so be an outsider to his age—thinks through exactly the possibility, feasibility and value of so transcending the contemporary world, overleaping his own age. Hemsterhuis attempts to live philosophy as an anachronism.

He does so, in part, out of a will to resist the present and its failings: ‘Those who say that our century is one of philosophy know very little of both philosophy and the century’, he insists (*B* 3.58). This counter-modern tendency comes to the fore in the late dialogues which are framed within a past—an *other* world—that is intended to alienate the reader from modern prejudices. Philosophy is undertaken in the past tense, as something archaic that refuses to be made present. Hemsterhuis weaponises an archaic past—both the Athenian settings of his dialogues and the archaic memories of even earlier times recounted within these dialogues—and he does so naively, i.e., *as forgery*, immediately and unreflectively immersing the reader in another epoch through a fictitious genealogy to his dialogues. To follow Hemsterhuis in philosophy is precisely to overleap one’s own age. Moreover, when Hemsterhuis does implicitly comment upon this immersion in a past world in the fictional prefaces to the dialogues, he does so by means of *Socratic irony*—flattering eighteenth-century Europe as an era of ‘perfection and refinement’, of ‘serious’ and ‘profound’ thought, in which ethics and metaphysics become ‘redundant’, in comparison to the ‘small’ and superfluous ancient dialogues written in ‘indecipherable jargon’ (*EE* 2.63). Hemsterhuis writes dialogues like Kierkegaard’s ‘philosophical crumbs’, gadflies that circumvent and so relativise dominant ways of envisioning things by means of invoking an *other philosophy*.

And yet, Hemsterhuis is not just a philosopher of the past; he is also very much a philosopher of the present. That is, as well as putting into question the claims of the present from an outsider perspective, he affirms them wholeheartedly by way of his commitment to an ideal of ‘absolute coexistence’ (*EE* 1.91), i.e., the making present of as many ideas as possible at the same time. This is what he calls ‘the optimum’ (*EE* 1.65) and it structures much of his thinking from his definition of beauty to his account of genius. It is ultimately an ideal of encyclopaedic thinking: bringing all ideas, however disparate, forgotten or foreign, into one synchronic structure—as Novalis paraphrases, ‘According to Hemsterhuis, science as a whole is... the *total-function of dates and facts*’ (1960-2006: 3.275). Or, as Hemsterhuis himself puts it, ‘Science would be perfect’ if the mind could simultaneously comprehend ‘ideas of all the relations and all the combinations of these objects’ (*EE* 1.122). As well as resisting the present by

way of the past, Hemsterhuis celebrates *at the same time* the Enlightenment quest for ‘everything all at once’.

Just like Novalis after him, Hemsterhuis thus occupies a radically ambivalent position in relation to modernity—an ambivalence that takes the form of a series of double affirmations: both the past and the present, both the archaic and the Enlightenment, both outsider and insider. And it is in the context of this radical ambivalence that the essays below by Viviana Galletta and Santiago Napoli can be understood. Galletta interrogates Hemsterhuis’s treatment of the relation between past and present epochs in the context of the eighteenth-century quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. She demonstrates how, from the *Lettre sur l’homme* to *Alexis*, Hemsterhuis goes beyond merely deconstructing any hierarchy into a ‘parallel’ of two epochs. He ends up seeing all epochs as, on the one hand, united by the fundamental ontological postulate of infinite perfectibility and, on the other hand, quantitatively differentiated by this principle too. Napoli focuses more specifically on the encyclopaedic ideal in Hemsterhuis as taken up by Novalis. The constitution of ‘total science’ as ‘the total-function of dates and facts’ occurs, Napoli shows, by way of an activation of the moral organ, insofar as this organ is interpreted by Novalis to be a tool of holistic intuition and one with a history that determines the teleological structure behind his own invocation of a *mathesis universalis*-to-come.

6. Experimental Method

Hemsterhuis stands in a long tradition of Dutch experimental philosophers, having studied at the feet of Boerhaave and ’s Gravesande, and this experimental spirit permeates his entire philosophy: from the vase experiment of the *Lettre sur la sculpture* onwards, Hemsterhuis thinks via experimentation. He works on aesthetics and morality (not just natural science) in a laboratory into which the reader must enter as a willing collaborator (see Sonderer 2022). As Weatherby puts it of Novalis, ‘Everything can become an experiment—everything an organ.’ (2018: 206) However, unlike many experimental philosophers of the eighteenth century, Hemsterhuisian experimentation is speculative, taking the philosopher outside of the current limits of experience in search of the *novum*. The opening to *Sophyle* is exemplary: Hemsterhuis turns to experiment not with a critical intention of ‘destroying fables’, ‘delivering us from prejudices and making clear the precise limits of our knowledge’, but instead ‘to see unknown lands of an immense size.’ (*EE* 2.45) As van Ruler puts it, Hemsterhuis ‘stretches the empirical method beyond its own limits’ (2005: 45). It is in this vein that

Jocelyn Holland's essay below stresses the scientific modelling that takes place in Hemsterhuis's texts in their analogy with romantic experimentation. Holland places Hemsterhuis's experiments on the concept of elasticity into conversation with naturephilosophical research into elasticity around 1800, particularly in Eschenmayer, Ritter and Novalis. She describes the various models of elasticity at play in these case studies, from the coil-spring to the elasticity of light, in order to exhibit how they mutate over the course of the latter half of the eighteenth century.

One of the key objects on which Hemsterhuis experiments is *himself*. The experimental method becomes both speculative *and introspective* in his philosophy. His correspondence is full of records of experiments performed on himself in order to get at untheorised powers of the mind. His is an anti-materialist variation of the Spinozan dictum: We do not yet know what *our mind* can do. Indeed, in a discussion of the possibility of knowledge of the future, Hemsterhuis writes as a kind of manifesto:

Man, who has made so much progress in physics, is still a child in psychology and metaphysics. Let him enter into himself, let him—in tranquillity—perform thousands of experiments on what occurs within him, on his own sensations, let him combine them, and you will see whether the data does not come forth all at once. (*B* 3.87)

Two illustrations help here. First, in April 1780, Hemsterhuis tells Gallitzin about a meditation taken too far and the resultant abnormal effects he has documented. 'On one occasion,' he writes, 'I was extremely disconcerted to find myself—after a meditation that was too long, too deep and too contrived—deprived of memory and imagination.' He then goes about recreating such a mental state, retaining self-consciousness at the limit of his psychic disturbance, so as to witness 'the material parts of the organ of the imagination losing their tone and their energy for a time' (*B* 3.33). Secondly, Hemsterhuis describes to Gallitzin a series of experiments in automatic writing. He claims, after the first attempt, that when one 'writes blindfolded or with eyes closed', our 'expressions will be much more virgin and more native and the pure thought will be exactly on the paper.' (*B* 5.7) And, on the second occasion, he holds out hope that, as we grow accustomed to it, 'the hand will constitute nothing more than a part of the brain', such that writing is 'reduced to *thinking*' (*B* 5.10).

Hemsterhuis experiments in the natural sciences, in psychology, in aesthetics, in ethics, etc.—that is, he experiments across domains. This is what Hammacher dubbed his 'analogy-thinking' (1971: 153): like Novalis and Schelling especially, Hemsterhuis is happy to proliferate 'category errors'

by using astronomical terms taken from Kepler to describe historical phenomena or physical concepts taken from Newton to describe the workings of the mind, of morality and of society. He is explicit on the philosophical value of this metabatic practice, indifferent to disciplinary boundaries: ‘Different categories,’ he writes, ‘borrow mutually from each other signs which properly belong to each of them... We borrow from the [physical] category signs of attraction, of inclination, of inertia so as to transport into someone else sensations of love, of friendship, of weakness, etc.’ (*B* 7.100) Hemsterhuis’s guiding thought is to ‘discard that ridiculous barrier that separates the material from the immaterial’ (*B* 6.55).

A number of the essays below explore this Hemsterhuisian thinking across domains. Gabriel Trop, like Holland, undertakes a conceptual genealogy of a scientific concept—in Trop’s case, force—from Hemsterhuis through romanticism (to Günderröde, via Herder, Goethe and Schiller), making clear the transdisciplinary status of this concept in crossing politics, aesthetics, history, religion, metaphysics, ethics and natural philosophy. For Trop, Hemsterhuis stands alongside the romantics in his reinvention of the concept of force as ecstatic, thereby transforming what it means for things—of whatever kind—to be in relation. Zorrilla focuses on the parallel concept of matter in Hemsterhuis’s philosophy. Using Schelling’s and Baader’s misattribution of the thesis that matter is ‘coagulated spirit’ as a jumping-off point, he shows how, ironically, something like this thought is indeed present in Hemsterhuis’s philosophy, even if never explicitly articulated. To show this, Zorrilla turns to the organ’s fundamental function for Hemsterhuis in mediating between domains: the material and the immaterial, the ethical and the physical, etc. All oppositions encounter one another by way of the organ, resulting in a perpetual circulation of sense between domains.

7. Histories of the Individual, of the Community and of the Cosmos

It is easy to fixate on Hemsterhuis’s invocation of Socrates in *Sophyle* as the thinker of introspection, as the thinker who first realises that philosophy is nothing more than what ‘is found at the bottom of our heart, of our souls, if we make the effort to seek it there’ (*EE* 2.47), as the thinker who calls on each reader an ‘to turn our gaze within’ (Cahen-Maurel 2022: 25–6; see van Bunge 2018: 188). This is of course true, but neglects a more visible function Socrates takes on in Hemsterhuis’s dialogues—as a character relating to other characters and conducting conversations in a social group. In addition to the introspective Socrates, Hemsterhuis also holds onto an ideal of Socratic sociability—a non-modern form of comportment that, to his mind, escapes

the statist, hierarchical and rigid models of intersubjective space that dominate modernity. Hemsterhuis's dialogues perform a Socratic community for the reader—a community which faces inwards and outwards at the same time. Moreover, it is this issue of mediation, intersubjectivity and community (in the broadest sense) that Andrew Mitchell takes up in his essay in the dossier—and like Zorrilla, he does so by way of sustained reflection on the concept of the organ. Mitchell undertakes something analogous to Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, rereading Hemsterhuis's understanding of finitude as a state of mediation not as a limitation or a negative definition, but as a positive ontology of community that does away with any need for release into transcendent bliss.

Hemsterhuis thinks on many scales, often simultaneously. This cross-scalar thinking is a consequence of both his commitment to the absolute coexistence of ideas and to his practice of domain-indifference. *Alexis* is the most obvious example of such 'tact': it argues for an anthropological truth (the contingency of the human subject possessing five sense organs) by way of a cosmological narrative of paradise and fall based on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century traditions of geological catastrophism, on ancient myths and on contemporary astronomical observations. At its most hyperbolic, this tendency is exemplified by Hypsicles, the priest who appears in *Alexis*, and who occupies an archaic position at the origin of Western modernity. He positions himself at a site prior to the separation of *logos* and *mythos*, prior to the disciplinary separation of sciences, a site of full semantic density, where the 'everything all at once' is performed in language. His words are symbolic in the strict romantic sense. In general, that is, for Hemsterhuis, psychological conclusions emerge out of speculation on the origin of the cosmos—in the *Lettre sur l'homme*, to take one more example, the origins of society are to be located in the individual's fear and trembling before the nihilistic implications of the Copernican revolution. The individual in the state of nature cannot cope with the fact 'that this globe was just a planet like so many others, that this important thing was a nothing, and that the universe was infinite' (*EE* 1.118). A political discourse on the origins of the social bleeds into a planetary one.

Kirill Chepurin's essay below takes seriously the cosmological story Hemsterhuis tells in *Alexis* as an attempt to do 'theodicy across scales'. He demonstrates the extent to which this dialogue arises out of a planetary concern with fallenness—it is a dialogue about global humanity, the geological history of the earth and the universe as a whole, all at the same time. *Alexis* is an anomalous and extreme example of the encyclopedic ideal of absolute coexistence: it is about everything all at once and, to this extent,

stands alongside the cognate romantic cosmisms that emerged in Jena during the 1790s.

Moreover, this cosmic story is but one of the most common methodological gestures in Hemsterhuis's philosophy—to embed a phenomenon within an overarching history that far exceeds it and so manifests the contingency of what had previously been taken to be immutable and necessary. Hemsterhuis follows Rousseau in using genealogy as a tool to undermine authority—and one helpful example is his critique of contemporary materialism. He undertakes this critique, not by way of establishing a dualism of the material and the immaterial, but by narrating the impermanence of the materialist idea of matter as part of a longer story. The result is that: what is currently thought to be 'material' (i.e., what is known through the five sense organs) is subject to change, as the nature of the human changes. Hence, despite their iconoclasm, Parisian materialists still consider matter too statically, too immutably; but Hemsterhuis is more radical: he puts matter into historical motion (and does the same for morality, religion, duty, law, sociability, atheism, empiricist methodology and philosophical knowledge itself).

8. New Genres of Thinking

Whatever else unites the above, one feature is Hemsterhuis's implicit opposition to both the Hegelian image of the philosopher as apprehending one's 'own time... in thoughts' and the Kantian image of the philosopher securely bedding in on the land of truth without transgressing its boundaries. From a Hemsterhuisian perspective, one can characterise both such images as ultimately uncreative and non-generative views of what the philosopher can do. Hemsterhuis, on the contrary, philosophises for the sake of the new, the experimental, the speculative and the contingent. Despite talking about the past so much, Hemsterhuis's is a philosophy of the future, of the infinite perfectibility of thinking.

Moreover, Hemsterhuis tries to make sense of this creative vocation for philosophy by reconceiving what philosophy might look like, whether that be in the halting, subjective presentations of the early letters, in the personal encyclopedia of the *Lettre sur l'homme*, in the ironic forgeries of the dialogues or in the reframing of *poesis* as the ground of philosophical truth in *Alexis*. Hemsterhuis experiments with both philosophical matter and philosophical form (see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1975, and Whistler 2022b). And at the heart of these experiments is an avowal of gibberish, conceived quasi-Platonically as the nonsense spouted by a philosopher misunderstood in his

own time. Again and again in correspondence, Hemsterhuis insists on his philosophical project as ‘my eternal gibberish’ (*B* 5.18) or ‘philofolly’ (*B* 6.47): ‘I do not produce anything but gibberish’, he insists repeatedly (e.g., *B* 5.15). This gibberish is to be found in the myths, forgeries, ironies and displays of erudition that litter Hemsterhuis’s texts, as well as in their various strategies for grappling and stuttering towards the new; it is what Diderot criticises as Hemsterhuis’s practice of generating images ‘pushed too far’ (Diderot and Hemsterhuis 1964: 471). And here once more Hemsterhuis very much stands *alongside the romantics*.

9. Note on Abbreviations

Throughout this dossier, the following two abbreviations are used for editions of Hemsterhuis’s work:

B François Hemsterhuis, *Briefwisseling (Hemsterhuisiana)*, 13 vols, ed. Jacob van Sluis. Berlstum, 2011-17. Citations by volume and numbered letter.

EE François Hemsterhuis, *The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, 3 vols, ed. Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022–23.

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Hemsterhuis and Mediation

*Andrew J. Mitchell**

ABSTRACT

This paper reconstructs Hemsterhuis as a thinker of mediation, as a philosopher who concentrates his attention on the organic dimension of existence, on the organs that grant us access to the world, while simultaneously keeping us at a distance from it. Hemsterhuis elaborates this thought of “organic mediation” across his letters and dialogues, and, in this paper, I seek to provide a more detailed reconstruction of how mediation operates throughout his work, responding to commentators who see in his thought an aversion to such a mediated condition and a wish to transcend it in a presumed union with God.

Keywords: organs, unity, division, media, subject, object

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der vorliegende Aufsatz stellt Hemsterhuis als Denker der Vermittlung dar, als ein Philosoph, der seine Aufmerksamkeit auf die organische Dimension der Existenz richtet, d.h. auf die Organe, die uns Zugang zur Welt gewähren und uns gleichzeitig auf Distanz zu ihr halten. Hemsterhuis arbeitet diesen Gedanken der „organischen Vermittlung“ in seinen Briefen und Dialogen aus. Es soll in diesem Aufsatz versucht werden, eine detailliertere Rekonstruktion der Funktionsweise der Vermittlung im Werk von Hemsterhuis zu liefern und auf Kommentatoren zu reagieren, die in seinem Denken eine Abneigung gegen einen solchen vermittelten Zustand und den Wunsch sehen, diesen in einer vermeintlichen Vereinigung mit Gott zu transzendieren.

Schlüsselwörter: Organe, Einheit, Teilung, Medien, Subjekt, Objekt

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1. Introduction

Hemsterhuis is a thinker of mediation. He concentrates his attention on the organic dimension of existence, on the organs that grant us access to the world, while simultaneously keeping us at a distance from it. Hemsterhuis elaborates this thought of “organic mediation” across his letters and dialogues, and in what follows I seek to provide a more detailed reconstruction of how mediation operates throughout his work, responding to commentators who see in his thought an aversion to such a mediated condition and a wish to transcend it in a presumed union with God.

Emphasizing mediation in Hemsterhuis is nothing particularly new, in a sense, mediation has operated in the background of his German reception from its outset, in somewhat latent form with Jacobi, and coming into full fruition with Novalis.¹ A quick sketch of the parameters of this reception will make clear some of the stakes that a thinking of mediation has enjoyed in the ages of Enlightenment and Romanticism alike.

In the *Pantheismusstreit* of the 1780s, Friedrich Jacobi draws on Hemsterhuis the most, treating him as a presumed interpreter of Spinoza and publishing their letters on the matter. The issue rests on whether God is identical with nature, which is to say, with whether God is present (immediately) as nature, or only reachable (mediately) through a transcendence of nature.² At times, Jacobi seems more interested in getting Hemsterhuis’s stamp of approval for his own recasting of Spinoza than for anything the latter would have to say for his own self, or on any topic other than the Spinozism / pantheism / atheism constellation. Indeed, Hemsterhuis himself seems a little perplexed over the effort to shoehorn him into a position on Spinoza, writing to Amalie Gallitzin on 11 April 1786:

I am very glad that Jacobi approves of me in regard to a few articles concerning the Divinity; however, if he believes me to be a Spinozist on any article whatsoever, it does not pain me, but, certainly, one of us is mistaken. Spinoza’s philosophy, and I dare say the same of my poor,

¹ Herder introduces Hemsterhuis to his German readership in 1781 with his translation of Hemsterhuis’s *Letter on Desires* accompanied by his own musings on the topics raised in the parallel-running essay “Love and Selfhood”. As the title suggest, love as the highest mediation between individuals and intersubjectivity are the points of Herder’s interest. See J. G. Herder, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernhard Suphan, vol. 15 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1888), 304–26.

² See F. H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel “Allwill,”* ed and trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 204–15 (the ‘Letter to Hemsterhuis’). Hemsterhuis’s response (the *Letter on Atheism*) was published by Jacobi as a supplement to the second edition of the *Spinoza-Letters* but is not included in the English translation of the *Spinoza-Letters*.

small one, is a totality, an edifice from which one cannot remove a stone without the whole thing collapsing. Now, if I know Spinoza, it seems to me that there are not two philosophies in the world that are more diametrically opposed. For him the Divinity is identified with the Universe and for me the distance between the two is infinite. (*B* 7.29)³

I hope to show in what follows that this “infinite distance” from immanence is not an embrace of transcendence (the opposite of immanence), but instead of organically mediated relation (something “infinitely” distinct from the immanence / transcendence opposition); for now, it is enough to note that Hemsterhuis rejects the attempt to identify God and nature.

If Jacobi was Hemsterhuis’s champion at the end of the Enlightenment, a decade later among the Romantics it was Novalis who was most inspired by him, and particularly with regard to the organic dimension of his thought.⁴ In 1797, Novalis compiled his *Hemsterhuis Studies*, something of a commonplace book, with extensive quotations from Hemsterhuis, copied from the letters and dialogues (including the *Letter on Atheism*), intermixed with commentary and extrapolations from Novalis.⁵ Throughout the entries there is no greater concern for Novalis than mediation and organicity.⁶ He hypothesizes that our organs could be refined to the point of picking up the most distant stimulus⁷, wonders if every productive finite being would thus

³ Translated by van Sluis and Whistler. For citations of Hemsterhuis’s work, see the explanation in the editor’s introduction to this special issue.

⁴ In his book, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), Leif Weatherby presents Novalis as a key figure in the history of “organology” that he traces, writing that “Novalis’s Romanticism is organology,” and observing that it is in part derived from “borrowings from Franz Hemsterhuis” (128–9), citing his influence on Novalis’s considerations of systematicity: “The mutable nature of organs – their possibilities of development – meant that the categorical system could not be fixed, and that syntheses of cognition were historical” (28). For his part, Schelling cites Hemsterhuis’s *Alexis* on the causes of the tilting of the earth’s axis—see F. W. J. Schelling, *Werke: Erster Ergänzungsband*, ed. Manfred Schröter (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1956), 542–3.

⁵ See “Hemsterhuis Studien,” in Novalis, *Schriften*, vol. 2, eds. Richard Samuel with Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1981), 360–78.

⁶ Dalia Nassar elegantly highlights the important and transformative role of Hemsterhuis in Novalis’s thinking, in *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795–1804* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 39–44. Hemsterhuis provided Novalis with “a way to think of the relational character of the self” (40), through him Novalis “begins to develop a communal consciousness” (41), and these ideas, Nassar claims, become central to Novalis’s “understanding of the absolute as inherently relational and developmental” (43). Hemsterhuis provides Novalis with the keys to what we might term a relational ontology: “It was in his studies of Hemsterhuis that he [Novalis] began to think of being in terms of relations and to emphasize the relational character of the self, both on the moral and the epistemological levels” (77).

⁷ Novalis, *Schriften*, 2.377.

be a “tool” or “organ” themselves⁸, and whether such organs would not actually work reciprocally⁹, connecting us to the world as much as the world to us (implicitly raising the question of who owns an organ?). While scholars have convincingly traced the transformation in Novalis effected by his encounter with Hemsterhuis’s ideas of organicity, I am aiming for something of the converse, and seek to sketch the idea of mediation operating in Hemsterhuis that would have attracted Novalis’s attention in the first place.¹⁰ What Jacobi and Novalis show is that mediation must be understood ontologically as constitutive of both world and individual.

To speak of an organic mediation of existence thus means: we do not receive the world “in itself” but as it appears to us through our organs, we do not engage the world immediately, but are always deferring, due to our organs. Because organs are apertures of relation, organic mediation means nothing exists independently, but is always found in relation. Mediation operates throughout Hemsterhuis’s thinking, through its every aspect. But a consequence of such mediation is that we are always at a remove from things, even when we wish to be united. Mediation means there is no chance for an utter union with the universe or the divine. Commentators have noted moments of seeming longing for such union in Hemsterhuis and I am not denying that these exist.¹¹ But it is my contention here that Hemsterhuis’s thinking of mediation runs so deep as to require us to rethink union in the first place. In what follows I sketch four areas of mediation in Hemsterhuis’s thinking: (i) the mediation of our organs, such that we never receive the world

⁸ *Ibid.*, 370.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 372-3.

¹⁰ Most recently, Nassar and Weatherby have shown Hemsterhuis’s importance for Novalis, and Novalis’s importance for thinking the organ, respectively, in the works cited above. I believe what I propose here complements both of their approaches (granting the import that Hemsterhuis places on the discipline and training of organs makes them more than merely passive, which Nassar seems to suggest [*Romantic Absolute*, 42–3], and that, as I hope to show, Hemsterhuis’s general demeanor towards organically mediated existence is not a “pessimistic attitude – ultimately Pauline,” as Weatherby seems to accept [*Transplanting*, 241]).

¹¹ See, for example, Jason Gaiger, who finds in moments of Hemsterhuis’s position “a deep-lying hostility or aversion towards the temporal dimension of experience.” “The Temporality of Sculptural Viewing in Hemsterhuis’s ‘Lettre sur la sculpture,’” in *Sculpture Journal* 27: 2 (2018), 246. Daniel Whistler, editor and translator of Hemsterhuis’s writings in English, also observes that “an objection to mediation” would be “something of a constant in Hemsterhuis’s philosophy.” “Forms of Philosophical Creativity: An Introduction to Hemsterhuis’s Dialogues” in François Hemsterhuis, *Early Writings, 1762–1773*, ed. and trans. Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 11. I do not take myself necessarily to be disagreeing with either of these positions, so much as hoping to show a different facet or a different tone, one more accepting, in Hemsterhuis’s thinking of mediation.

“in itself,” (ii) the mediation of time, such that we never get the world all at once, (iii) the mediation of morality, whereby the self is always understood through others, and (iv) the mediation of world, such that what we call our own world is just a few facets of an infinitely grander universe and nothing independently existing on its own. I conclude by taking up this question of a longing for union in Hemsterhuis’s thought and argue that Hemsterhuis remains undeterred in allegiance with our organic, mediated condition.

2. The Mediation of Organs

Sense organs are typically conceived of as mediators between a subject equipped with them and an object to be engaged: subject – organ – object. An organ is a “means,” as Hemsterhuis defines it, “that which can get something done in some way” (*EE* 2.74). Usually, for such models, the object perceived remains the same across whatever organ is used to perceive it. The organ is viewed as interchangeable and detached from both the subject who employs it and the object it would relay. In such a scheme, the subject and the object are disconnected from and indifferent to each other and thus stand in need of a mediating third party. Hemsterhuis avoids the subject-object dualism lingering in such a conception of mediation, along with the idea that media would be a separate third term between these two. Media is nothing that intervenes between two otherwise self-enclosed entities (subject / object). Mediation transforms those entities themselves.

From the beginning, then, our knowledge of the world is composed of ideas conveyed to us by our sense organs: “I wish it were the case that the ideas we have of things were the things themselves, then, at least, we would never fall into error. But this is impossible, because the things that are outside us cannot get into our heads; and therefore, media and organs are necessary for us to have some sensation of their existence” (*EE* 2.49). The outer world could not otherwise matter to us or be experienced by us than through these organs. But organs alone are not enough, they also require their respective media, as Hemsterhuis here notes, further complicating the typical, triune model of subject – organ – object.

Such a model is untenable for understanding how inherently organic and organized existence is. On Hemsterhuis’s model, an entity or “essence” operates through a medium (or “vehicle”) in order to reach us by means of our sense organs. We see as much in the myth Diotima tells of the creation of the human by Prometheus as recounted by Socrates in the dialogue *Simon*:

Prometheus made an infinite number of openings or apertures through which actions, perceptions, sensations or ideas of infinitely different

kinds were to enter, and for each opening he made a kind of tube which was analogous to the kind of perception or sensation that it was to receive and transmit [...]. To receive the actions of essences as visible, he made the tube whose end is the organ that we call the eye which is analogous to light – the only vehicle which can communicate the actions of an essence as visible. To receive the actions of essences as audible, he made the tube whose end is the organ that we call the ear, which is analogous to the air – the only vehicle that can communicate the actions of an essence as audible; and so on to infinity. (*EE* 2.114)

Organs are thus conduits for transmitting sensations. Each organ is keyed to a specific kind of object and operates by means of a particular medium or “vehicle” for the transmission of sensation to that organ (the eye to the visible by means of light, for example). Infinite kinds of sensations and ideas enter each organ. Prometheus equipped the human with an infinite number of such organs.

Each of these organs brings a particular infinitude of “sensation” to the individual, they are avenues for the approach of a particular facet of the world (visual, audible, etc.). But organs do not operate on their own, they also need a “vehicle” or medium for the transmission of its content. If there is no light (the medium for vision), then we cannot see the objects around us. Indeed, the medium is so necessary to organs that Hemsterhuis basically identifies them, as here in the *Letter on Man and his Relations*, where he writes, “I dub organ not only the eye that sees, but also the light reflected from the object; not only the ear that hears, but also the air set in oscillation by the movement of the object” (*EE* 1.89). The medium that enables the organ is actually a part of, or an extension of, the organ itself. What this means is that our bodies do not stop at our skin. If the organs indissociably bring with them their respective media, and if my body is composed of those organs, then my body is likewise to be understood as those media. Not just the eye is a part of my body, but the light by which I see is likewise an “organ” of my body. Organs and media are thus so many funnels of worldly sensation. The organ and the medium drag me out of my skin and expose me to the world.

The medium extends the organ, and there is something about organs that welcomes such extension. If the organ brings world, then whatever assists with that is likewise serving an organic function. There is a kind of extensibility by prosthesis here. Hemsterhuis seems to affirm as much in a discussion of the soul’s relation to the body, where he notes that “everything that is homogeneous to these organs becomes an organ for it” (*EE* 1.96). Whatever appears to the organ within the medium that surrounds it can be appropriated for use as an extension of the organ or as prosthesis. We see this

in a comment he makes regarding the soul's "velleity" (its directedness, its existence understood as intentional, as a willing): "when taking up a stick, the effect of the soul's velleity is manifested just as much at the end of the stick as at the end of one's fingers" (*EE* 1.81). The body does not end at the finger here, perhaps not even at the stick, if the stick is now understood to open up a whole extended range of the organ, a world that announces itself to the stick and which the stick helps articulate in taps and thrusts of meaning.

But the medium is not to be understood as intervening between two fully present entities, a subject and an object, for example. The medium as "between" them does not need to wait for them to arrange themselves for it to then subsequently arise from their midst. The between of mediation is not an effect of presence. The reverse is more likely the case here, that what we think of as a fully present object is really an abstraction from mediation. The medium is prior to the object and not something simply added to two otherwise intact entities, indifferent to its arrival. Hemsterhuis rebuffs such a conception from both sides, that of the subject and the object.

Regarding the subject, a key point to bear in mind is that we arrive at our sense of self through the organs. Speaking of the soul, Hemsterhuis writes: "Everything that is outside of it and of which it has ideas is the starting point from which it departs to arrive at the conviction of its own existence. If this starting point were removed, that is, if the organs by which it could have ideas of external things were annihilated, it could have no sensation of its own existence" (*EE* 1.96). Even basic cogitation is organic, "In order to have ideas, to think, to act, [the soul] needs organs" (*EE* 1.96). The soul does not have some immediate knowledge of itself, is not transparent to itself, but requires the use of organs to distinguish itself from the world around it.

Regarding the object, all we know of it is likewise due to our organs. In his discussion of beauty in the *Letter on Sculpture*, Hemsterhuis notes that what we call beautiful cannot be defined by extrinsic, objective criteria alone. There is no objective beauty as such, but instead (pace Hogarth's "line of beauty" and presaging Kant), the beautiful is understood as always relative to us. The beautiful, Hemsterhuis observes,

is analogous – not to the essence of things – but to the effect of the relation that holds between things and the construction of my organs. Change things, [and] the nature of our ideas of the beautiful will remain the same, but if you change the essence of our organs, or the nature of their construction, all of our current ideas of beauty will immediately fall back into nothing. (*EE* 1.66)

Simply put, “beauty has no reality in itself” (*EE* 1.66), but is always determined by our organs (we will explore the mechanism of this in the next section). Our world is not independent of our organs. Rather, our organs bring us the world analogous to or homogeneous with (to use Hemsterhuis’s favored locutions) those organs themselves.¹² We always encounter the worlds of our organs, not the world as such. The world is always already organized and interpreted, we might say.

The point is reiterated more strongly in regard to another main theme of Hemsterhuis’s, matter. Matter is typically construed as the objective par excellence. But Hemsterhuis again will not allow such a naïve realist conception to invade his thinking. Instead, matter, too, like beauty, must be understood relative to our organic constitution. As the dialogue *Sophylus* puts it: “the word matter is only a sign to express essences insofar as they have some analogy to our current organs” (*EE* 2.54). The point is somewhat broadened in *Simon* during Diotima’s telling of Prometheus’s construction of the human with an infinitude of tubes qua organs. When Socrates interrupts her to say that he only knows of three or four organs, not the infinitude of them that Prometheus has made, Socrates reports her reply: “My dear Socrates, she said to me, a day will come when you will receive ideas and sensations through all these tubes and ends, and then they will all seem equally material to you, because you call matter all that gives you ideas by means of the organs that you know yourself” (*EE* 2.114).

Returning to our traditional model of mediation, subject – organ – object, we see that Hemsterhuis has unmade the seemingly unified middle term of “organ.” There is no solitary isolatable organ to be positioned between two already extant parties. The organ always brings its medium with it, it is also infinitely extensible via prosthesis. The triune model cannot stand on these grounds alone, an organ is nothing isolatable. But that non-isolatability of the organ also calls into question the very integrity of the subject and object alike. The subject only knows itself through the world of objects and the object is only known through our organs, not in itself. The organ is not something that the entity can remain indifferent to, it does not

¹² Despite Hemsterhuis’s own usage here, I have avoided the term “reality” for the universe Hemsterhuis describes, because reality seems a term too easily aligned modally with both the possible and the necessary. Hemsterhuis rethinks modality in his work and seems to reject both the possible and the necessary in favor of a more multi-faceted universe. On the possible, see the *Letter on Man and His Relations* where “the existent and the possible are but one and the same thing before God” (*EE* 1.125). On the necessary, see *Aristaeus* where “we clearly see that the word *necessary* is only an epithet added to what is; and that to be, to act, to produce, to persist necessarily, says nothing other than to be, to act, to produce, or to persist” (*EE* 2.72).

exist apart from it. The organ serves as an opening to relation, it compromises any presumption of integrity in advance. Organs give us over to a world not of independence, but of relation. Hemsterhuis emphasizes the point in *Sophylus*:

EUTHYPHRO: All essences that coexist necessarily relate to each other somehow.

SOPHYLUS: That's true.

EUTHYPHRO: Therefore, every essence that coexists with us relates to us somehow.

SOPHYLUS: Yes. (*EE* 2.54)

Thanks to organs, nothing exists independently and alone, not even the subject and object of metaphysical thought.

3. Temporal Mediation

Temporal mediation is intimately tied to organic mediation. While the mediation of organs meant that we only know our world and ourselves through them, temporal mediation is a matter of deferral. We see this most clearly in a central tenet of the *Letter on Sculpture*, where Hemsterhuis avers, “the soul judges as the most beautiful what it can form an idea of in the smallest space of time” or, more precisely put, “the soul wants naturally to have a large number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time” (*EE* 1.63). This aspect of the soul is not only the key to Hemsterhuis's aesthetics, but to the temporal mediation that we are interested in as well.

In the *Letter on Sculpture*, Hemsterhuis reports of an informal experiment he conducted, showing people two drawings of different vases, each with the same number of points along its outline or contour, one a bit more jagged and ornate, the other a little simpler and smoother, and asking the people which vase they found more beautiful. He discovers that the vase with the smoother contour was unanimously voted the more beautiful. His explanation for this is again at the level of the organ (the eye) and has to do with a certain temporal lag:

You are aware, Sir, from applying the laws of optics to the structure of our eye, that in a single movement, we obtain a distinct idea of almost one single visible point alone, which is painted clearly on the retina; thus, if I want to have a distinct idea of an entire object, I must move the axis of the eye along the contours of this object, so that all the points that compose this contour are painted successively at the back of the eye with all the requisite clarity; and then the soul links together all these elementary points and ultimately acquires the idea of the contour as a

whole. Now it is certain that this linking is an action in which the soul employs time, and more time if the eye is less exercised in traversing the objects. (*EE* 1.62)

Since the eye sees one point at a time, to see a whole object clearly it must skim across every point of its contour. All of these individual, punctuated moments are then synthesized or combined by the soul to yield an idea of the object as a whole. Hemsterhuis's claim for aesthetics is that the smoother the contour of a figure, the easier it is for the eye to gather its points and deliver them to the soul for synthesis. Smoother figures, visually easier to glean, are represented by us more quickly than more halting or jaggedly contoured figures.

The process of going point by point along the contours is what costs us time; the need to do so is on account of our organs. The organs take time to give the soul the idea. And not all organs operate at the same rate of transmission. Recalling the myth of Prometheus' construction of the human as a figure equipped with an infinitude of "tubes" as organs, Diotima says:

Remember, Socrates, that the human soul does not enjoy omnipresence like Jupiter's soul does, therefore the actions of external essences on it must be transported by means of some vehicle. The action of a visible essence is communicated by light; that of an audible essence is transported by means of vibrations of air. Know, Socrates, that the movements of all these vehicles do not have the same velocities. The movement of air is less rapid than that of light, and there are thousands of vehicles whose vibrations have not yet arrived at the tubes that are made to receive them. (*EE* 2.114)

The organs differ among themselves at a temporal level as well, they are subject to delays and slow speeds of transmission. The work of collation performed by the soul assembles the temporally distinct facets of sensation into a unified, trans-facetal objective world.

This means that the soul receives its sense of the object only after a process of assembly. It must wait before it can enjoy or take satisfaction in the object. The soul cannot have its object all at once, cannot enjoy a "perfect" union with it. As Hemsterhuis explains regarding the soul, "what prevents it from being satisfied in this respect lies in the necessity by which it is compelled to use organs and media, and to act by way of a succession of time and parts" (*EE* 1.79). It is the organs that are keeping us from this perfected enjoyment, this fusion, they force us to gather things point by point, not all at a glance, and thereby they cost us time: "If the soul could be affected by an object without the means of organs, the time it would take for it to form

the idea would be reduced to precisely nothing” (*EE* 1.79). That state of undelayed, instantaneous enjoyment and consummation, however, is not ours, for “in the current state in which the soul is found, it is almost impossible to reach this union except by means of organs, [then] it is equally impossible to obtain that perfect enjoyment in anything at all” (*EE* 1.80). Because of our organic condition, nothing can be perfectly enjoyed.

That is not necessarily a bad thing, in that “perfect” enjoyment would simultaneously mean the elimination of both subject and object at once; indeed, the point of perfection rushes past mere union and headlong into their very eradication. Perfect enjoyment is non-being.¹³ Hemsterhuis’s statement is not a lament that we can never enjoy perfectly, but more a realization that we have no world but this world and its imperfect enjoyments.

In all these discussions about temporal delays and transmissions, we must bear in mind that the time we experience is itself an organic construct. Hemsterhuis certainly implies as much in the “General Remark” to the *Letter on Desires*: “Duration is measured by the time that the organ employs in giving to the soul the idea of the whole object, or the modification of that object, inasmuch as it is analogous to the construction of the organ” (*EE* 1.86). Given this, there would be no time “in itself.”

For this reason, our organs could be said to be necessary for time. The delay of the organs keeps everything from happening all at once. The organs and the media allocate our moments of exposure into a coherent assemblage. We need our organs in order that there not be a One, much less a Nothingness. Organs buffer us from these. Organic time defers oblivion. The temporal deferral of our organs is constitutive of our experience as finite beings.

4. Morality as Mediation

Part of the thinking of mediation treats of non-independence. Nothing stands “outside” of mediation. Mediation does not fall “between” two otherwise present entities as an intervening middle-space. Nothing stands outside this middle zone, nothing is independent, everything organic billows out through the media of the organs in so many apertures of experience and routes of contact. To be independent would be to stand outside of mediation, self-

¹³ Consider the striking language used to describe this union in the dialogue *Aristaeus*, where Aristaeus is asked about this union whether it is a matter of theoretical contemplation. He replies, “To contemplate it? – to possess it, to be absolutely master of it, to admire it, to embrace it, to smother it with my caresses, to devour it” (*EE* 2.79). Such love does not bode well for its recipient.

contained and complete, but also trapped within oneself, straitjacketed in a body that would have to be, in a certain sense, without organs. To be independent would be to be non-relational and we have already seen a central claim of Hemsterhuis's that: "every essence that coexists with us relates to us somehow" (*EE* 2.54). The fact of this relationality undoes any presumption of independence on the part of a subject or anything else that might essence.

The relationality that connects all that is provides a condition for morality; our actions are tied to others. It should come as no surprise that, for Hemsterhuis, this morality is likewise a matter of organs – this time of the "moral organ." Morality as organic is nothing incompatible with our other more traditionally regarded organs: "There is no more incommensurability between the moral face of the universe and the visible face than between the visible face and the audible face, or between the audible face and the tangible face, etc." (*EE* 1.103). Morality too requires a medium in which to appear; what appears to us as moral can only do so based on our ability to receive it as such. Otherwise put, and recalling our earlier discussion of organs, there is no morality in itself.

Hemsterhuis believes the organic basis of morality has long been overlooked and he intends to examine "more closely this organ, which until now has no proper name and which is commonly referred to as heart, sentiment, conscience" (*EE* 1.104). The names he mentions point to different capacities of the moral organ, each central to his conception of morality more broadly: sympathizing (heart and sentiment) and introspection (conscience).

Making morality a matter of organs (mediators between soul and world) means that morality has a medium as well. Things appear moral in the medium of the moral organ. That medium is human sociability. Morality requires a medium of intersubjective society. Hemsterhuis explains, "just as the organs of hearing and of sight would not be manifest to any man endowed with them, if there were no air and light, so too the heart, conscience, is manifest in man only when he is to be found among other animate beings, among other velleities acting opposed to or in conformity with his velleity" (*EE* 1.104). Morality for Hemsterhuis names our being with others, both in terms of community and communication (written signs, for example, are part of the moral medium): "Just as the eye would be totally useless without light or visible things, the organ that I call the heart is perfectly useless to man without active velleities or society with such velleities through communicative signs" (*EE* 1.105).

The moral organ puts me in community with others and Hemsterhuis refers to this as an act of multiplication, "when, by means of the moral organ,

he communicates with other individuals of the same species, his *I* is multiplied by the number of individuals he knows and which compose society” (*EE* 1.112). The multiplication results from the push and pull of relationality. Because everything that exists relates, because it is of my essence to relate, then I am always ineradicably in a relation with other *Is*. I am so ineradicably related to these other *Is* that I cannot be myself without them. Thus, there is a sense in which, through necessarily relating to them, I *am* them. Hemsterhuis himself discusses this strange fact of relationality (that I can only be affected by what can affect me and thus only by what is “homologous,” “homogeneous,” or “analogous” to me, to use three of Hemsterhuis’s preferred terms for this conformity), in a note to *Aristaeus*:

Identified with the other, the good that it does to the other is a good that, in fact, it does to itself; it enjoys the fruits of its own generosity.... [M]an would do good to the other, since he makes himself the other: he does what is good so as to do good to himself. It must be admitted that Diocles’ reasoning nicely establishes the precept: Love your neighbour as yourself. (*EE* 2.82n)

This connection through relationality, a connection that can never be an identity, is what enables the “heart” and its “sentiment.” The moral organ is the condition for shared feeling, in a perfected state of which, we would relate to others as we do ourselves. Hemsterhuis states this in imagining a primitive society of purely equal parties, explaining that “their moral organ was absolutely perfect, in such a way that each individual had sensations of the joys and sufferings of other individuals that were as strong as those of his own condition” (*EE* 1.112). Morality overcomes egoism.

The moral organ does this by making the *I* an object for itself. This is where the “conscience” function comes in. This distinguishes the moral organ from our other current sense organs:

But this organ, this heart, which gives me sensations of this face of the universe, differs from our other organs principally in that it gives us a sensation of a face of which our soul, our *I*, forms a part; thus, for this organ, the *I* itself becomes an object of contemplation and therefore this organ does not give us merely, like our other organs, sensations of the relations which external things have to us, but also those of the relations that we have to these things. And from this the first sensation of duty results. (*EE* 1.104–5)

The moral organ effects a kind of reversal, whereby we sense how things affect us, it gives us to understand how we receive the world, how we are at

stake in it. Our attention shifts from an external quality of the object to a more personal feeling or mood of engagement.

The I is able to take itself for an object of contemplation due to the relational nature of existence. Hemsterhuis sees in the human the ability to adopt the standpoint of another human and to judge oneself from that newly transposed position. “The active being,” he writes, “is endowed with the moral principle, which transports it, so to speak, into other beings and makes it sense, suffer and enjoy on their behalf” (*EE* 2.85). This transport is understood as a kind of identification:

It is this moral principle, by which an individual identifies himself with another essence in some way, by which he senses what she senses, and [by which] he can contemplate himself from the centre of another individual, so to speak, and it is from this that sensations of commiseration, justice, duty, virtues [and] vices arise. (*EE* 2.82)

Morality for Hemsterhuis is not a matter of transcending our situation or even of understanding it formally or objectively. Instead, it is a matter of more fully examining ourselves within our situation, but now from the perspective of others. The hermeneutic situation established by our organs cannot be transcended or escaped.

The connectedness of what exists invests us in the being of others. Through it we are able to sympathize with them. It also allows us an outside purchase on our own behaviors, a standard or expectation by which to judge them. A certain humility accompanies the moral organ in that allowing myself to be regarded as an object deprives me of the arrogance of unrestrained subjectivity. The moral organ undermines the independence of the subject. It cannot be said to exist apart from others. It is so much with others that it cannot be understood as only itself, but is likewise also these others. And the self itself is only known by going through these others. Morality requires the spacing of organs; morality mediates selfhood.

5. The Mediated World and the Multifaceted Universe

The next form of mediation I wish to consider concerns the multifaceted nature of the universe itself. Just as the subject must be understood as always in relation with others, as possessing a moral organ, so too must the world. That is to say, the world as we know it is always in relation with other worlds. Hemsterhuis terms the world of sensations that an organ brings us a “face” of the universe, which we might understand, drawing on his own lapidary

interests, as a “facet” of reality.¹⁴ Our organs bring us various faces of what is (or of what exists as essence). But there are more faces of the world than those for which we have organs.

Hemsterhuis repeatedly argues for the infinite faces of the world on the basis of our limited organic constitution. Much hinges on the fact that our particular set of sense organs are not all that we can imagine or even already know. As Euthyphro summarizes in the *Sophylus* dialogue, “An essence can have a hundred thousand sides, all pertaining equally to its nature, and among which only three or four are analogues to our current organs. An essence can have a hundred thousand faces which pertain equally to its nature, and none of which is turned toward our organs” (*EE* 2.51–52). There are faces of the world that are not turned toward us and of which we know nothing. There is more to the world than what touches our organs; or, the essences that touch our organs can touch others in different ways as well.

More than this, Hemsterhuis is not settled on the number of organs that we do have. The organs are quite plastic. He repeatedly emphasizes the need to train, exercise, and discipline our organs so as to perfect them. But entirely new organs seem a possibility for him as well. We see mention of this in *Simon*, where the purpose of art, according to the speech of a Scythian stranger reported by Socrates, is “to enrich the body by adding to the organs and perfecting them” (*EE* 2.110). This idea that there could be even more organs than we currently possess (beyond even our “moral organ” and what Hemsterhuis calls the “organ” of the intellect), proves entrancing to Socrates, who pleads with Diotima, “Divine Diotima, I said to her, you for whom the future is present, you who have commerce with the Gods, please teach me whether our souls enjoy more organs than those we already know” (*EE* 2.113). It is here where Diotima recounts Prometheus’ fashioning of the human with an infinite number of organ tubes, telling Socrates that “a day will come when you will receive ideas and sensations through all these tubes and ends” (*EE* 2.114).¹⁵

¹⁴ Hemsterhuis demonstrates the use of the term in a note to *Sophylus*: “All that composes or can compose the All, or the entire universe, is necessarily essence. Insofar as essences relate to the organ of sight, these essences are called visible essences or things; insofar as essences relate to the organ of hearing, these essences are called audible essences or things. Thus, such a modification, such a way of being, by which some essences relate to the organ of sight, is called the visible face of the universe; and such a modification, such a way of being, by which some essences relate to the organ of hearing, is called the audible face of the universe” (*EE* 2.52n).

¹⁵ The point returns at the close of the “Letter on Atheism,” where we are advised to keep in mind that “matter is but a word which designates all real essences as they relate to our current organs; that matter cannot have more attributes than we have organs; and that if it is given to man’s nature to acquire more organs in his future existence, or if other organs

But along with this faith in future organs, there is also the worry that we may well have lost some of our earlier organs and with them their respective faces of the universe. This is a recurrent theme in the dialogue *Alexis, or on the Golden Age*. The speech of the priest Hypsicles, as reported by Diocles, asserts that if we reflect on the gaps and lacunae in our systems of science and knowledge, then it is impossible

to not sense the large probability that it is the case that we have lost senses or rather vehicles of action which were analogous to them, by means of which intermediary ideas and sensations previously made a whole or a sum of our limited knowledge, of which there no longer remains any vestige except in the more or less altered traditions of our ancient condition? (*EE* 2.138)¹⁶

So the organs that we do have are plastic, there are infinite organs we do not have, there are organs we do not yet know we have, and there are organs we have lost. Each of these organs is coded to a particular face of the universe.

Hemsterhuis does not argue too strongly for his claim; simply put, the argument seems to be: we have a finite number of sense organs, some animals have sense organs we do not, therefore it must be possible that there is an infinite number of sense organs and facets of reality corresponding to them. The dialogue *Sophylus*, gives the argument directly:

the number of times that I may have a different idea of matter, or rather of essence, depends on the number of my organs and on my media; and since I am able to suppose an indefinite number of organs and media, matter, or rather essence, can be perceived in different ways an indefinite number of times; and therefore matter, or rather essence, has an infinite number of attributes. (*EE* 2.52)

A lot of work is done in the arguments by the word “indefinite” or its seeming synonym “infinite,” which, through its sheer magnitude, is able to shift the slightest of possibilities into the realm of probability for Hemsterhuis. An infinitely small chance over an infinite amount of time would seem to necessarily come through, or, for Hemsterhuis, at least attain the probability of doing so. Already in the *Letter on Man and his Relations*, he had observed,

thus develop, [then] matter (if we want to keep hold of this word as a sign for essences as known) will increase its attributes proportionately” (“Letter on Atheism,” vol. 3: 115–16, draft).

¹⁶ The point is restated by Alexis with a slight shift in emphasis: “man is not here everything which the nature of a complete being demands and that, therefore, the human species could well have lost in a prior revolution either some organ (which is less probable) or some vehicle of sensation” (*EE* 2.142).

“there is not only the possibility, but the probability of an infinite progression of organs which would make known an infinite progression of faces of the universe” (*EE* 1.103).

Hemsterhuis’s thinking of mediation is so thoroughgoing as to deprive us of even the thought of a single reality to which we would have some semblance of oversight. An infinity of shimmering facets of the world shine apart from us, unbeknownst to us and unremarked by us beyond this mere place holding. In *Alexis*, Hemsterhuis writes that “a limited being cannot exist by itself” (*EE* 2.127). We can say the same for each of the infinite faces of the universe.

6. The Immediate Temptation of Union

Given this repeated emphasis on mediation, Hemsterhuis would seem quite at ease with and accepting of the idea of relational distance. Mediation may connect us and put us in contact, but it also precludes utter union. Some have detected a longing for the latter in Hemsterhuis, and with it a renunciation of mediation. Mediation would be acknowledged by Hemsterhuis, in all its variety of forms and as a basic principle, but he would simultaneously advocate that we strive to transcend it. Mediation would be a mark of our fallen condition and we would overcome this by some form of prescribed union with God. We are even told in seeming confirmation of this view that our “material husk must be shaken off” and that “death is necessary” (*EE* 2.98). I wish to examine this tension as it appears in two contrasting moments of the *Letter on Sculpture*. Ultimately my contention is that Hemsterhuis’s notion of mediation is so robust as to require us even to rethink what we mean by divine union in the first place.

In the *Letter on Sculpture*, in a peculiar discussion of the disgust that arises from becoming too familiar with a work of art, Hemsterhuis avers that “owing to this property, it seems incontestable that there is something in our soul that loathes all relation to what we call succession or duration” (*EE* 1.67). The point would be a complaint against our organic condition that requires we proceed stepwise in this way. The eye must fall upon each individual point of the vase’s contour and present these successively to the soul, which seems to wait about in the meantime growing increasingly frustrated with the process. Here it is described as a loathing. The soul would rather skip the process and have the result all at once.

Hemsterhuis elaborates his position in the *Letter on Desires*, a kind of sequel to the letter on sculpture, the two connected on just this crucial point.

The loathing of succession is now cast from another perspective as a desire for utter union, though one that can never be achieved. He writes:

When I contemplate some beautiful thing, e.g. a beautiful statue, I actually search solely to unite my being, my essence, with this being so heterogeneous [to me]; but after numerous contemplations I feel myself disgusted with the statue, and this disgust arises solely from the tacit reflection I make on the impossibility of a perfect union. (*EE* 1.80)

Our appreciation of the beauty of the statue seeks to have the greatest number of ideas presented to us in the shortest period of time. The time it takes to glean the object can be reduced as far as possible, but it never achieves instantaneity; there is always separation. Mediation precludes a kind of fulfillment in consummation (the smothering, mortal love relation detailed by *Aristaeus*). As such, if one continues to long for immediacy, there is only never-ending frustration to be found. The disgust at the impossibility of a perfect union would again be disgust at mediation.

But this loathing and disgust at succession, duration, imperfect unions does not lead to asceticism or renunciation on the part of Hemsterhuis. He does not try to minimize our time in this world, nor does he cajole us to transcend it or depart from it. Instead, the impossibility of utter union can be understood to have a transformative effect, at the very least in terms of where we orient our desires and what we train them to want. We cannot have utter union, we should instead focus on what we can have, or as *Diocles* puts it in *Aristaeus*, “it is necessary to look for relationships that you can change” (*EE* 2.95).

The impossibility of utter union becomes a welcoming of proliferation. The same *Letter on Sculpture* that spoke of a loathing of succession, also includes this thought experiment following on from the discussion of the ratio of the beautiful (to have the most ideas in the least time):

Does it not follow, Sir, in a rather geometrical manner, that the soul judges as the most beautiful what it can form an idea of in the smallest space of time? But this being so, the soul should therefore prefer a single black dot on a white background to the most beautiful and richest of compositions; and, indeed, if you give a choice between the two to a man enfeebled by long illnesses, he will not hesitate in preferring the point to the composition; but it is the indolence of his organs which causes this judgement. A healthy, tranquil soul, in a well-constituted body, will choose the composition, because it gives him a larger number of ideas at the same time. (*EE* 1.63)

The single black dot would indeed give us an idea of it in a very short period of time. But the soul does not want this. Its goal is not to receive things as quickly as possible (not unless there is an organic malfunction), but to receive as much as possible in as short a time as possible. Minimizing the content to reduce the delivery is counter-productive for Hemsterhuis, because the soul wants the world, wants this proliferation beyond the mere dot.

Hemsterhuis concludes from this in passing something that likewise betrays his allegiances to this world, an embrace of ornamentation. We read on the same page of the sculpture letter Hemsterhuis's conclusion from this situation: "Therefore, the soul wants naturally to have a large number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time, and it is from this we have ornaments: otherwise, all ornamentation would be a useless trifle [*hors d'oeuvre*] that insults practice, common sense and nature" (*EE* 1.63). The soul does not want the black dot, it wants world, and that means not just monumentally meaningful art that challenges our existential commitments, but ornamentation, trifles, proliferation. Hemsterhuis's aesthetic position is ultimately a justification of ornamentation, the same ornament that is too often aligned with the detritus of modernity, ornament as clutter, especially when compared with the idealized simple contours of classical sculpture. Hemsterhuis does not agree with such regressive views, he embraces proliferation.

If the latter case (Hemsterhuis opting for proliferation) trumps the former case (a loathing of mediation), then we would expect to see this reflected in the very sense of union, whether with the universe or the divine, and we do. The *Letter on Desires* takes as its central concern issues of union, physical and otherwise. The penultimate paragraph of the concluding "general remark" speaks directly to our worry:

let us suppose, I say, the actuality of this perfect union, or rather of this identification, to be impossible or absurd. It will, however, be clear that the soul in its desires tends by its nature towards this union, or it desires a continual approximation. This is the hyperbola with its asymptote: and such is all I wished to demonstrate in this investigation of the nature of desires. (*EE* 1.87)

We see here that utter union is impossible as an achievement, though operative at a kind of regulative level. We can only approximate this union and approach it asymptotically. But the fact that we can never achieve utter union also means we can always further develop our union.

The cultivation and perfection of our organs that Hemsterhuis continually advocates is part of this asymptotic approximation. In *Simon*, Diotima explains the process to Socrates:

It is with such wings that some fortunate souls raise themselves. They devote themselves entirely to the charge of perfecting themselves. They disengage themselves from all that is earthly and perishable around them. They accelerate their development, and new organs manifest themselves. It is then that our relations to the Gods become more immediate, and that the universe manifests itself to us from several sides which are yet naught to you and other men. (*EE* 2.121)

The trajectory that Diotima lays out includes a disengagement from the world, which at first seems to confirm previously raised suspicions of asceticism. This disengagement, though, is not in order to leave the world, but to configure new relations to it, to develop new organs for it. The relation to the gods becomes more “immediate,” Diotima says, but this immediacy is no longer something opposed to mediation, but only attainable through it. That is to say, the relation is to become more immediate and it does so not by casting off organic mediation, but through a proliferation of organs, the discovery, cultivation, and training of new organs. To have more avenues of mediation, more apertures opening the world, is to enjoy a more perfected, organic existence.

Nowhere is this more evident than at the close of Diotima’s speech at the end of *Simon*:

The most beautiful work of man, Socrates, is to imitate the sun and to cast off its outer layers in as few centuries as possible. And when the soul is completely freed, it becomes all organ. The gap which separates the visible from the audible is filled with other sensations. All sensations are linked and together form one body, and the soul sees the universe not in God, but in the manner of the Gods. (*EE* 2.121)

Hemsterhuis’s goal for the human, our state of perfection, would never be the loss of our self in utter or immediate union. Again, the principle is one of proliferation, more organs. The goal is to become “all organ” such that a continuous panorama of sensation is achieved. To be all organ, to activate the infinitude of tubes and apertures, is to perceive “in the manner of the Gods.” The gods themselves perceive this way, i.e., through organs, and this means always at a distance. Immediacy becomes in-mediacy.

Mediation disrupts the presumed integrity of both subject and object, placing them in an essential relationship with one another by interweaving

them through world. Organic mediation opens the entity to worlds of sensation, mingling it out beyond itself, distributing it throughout its world. Because mediation undermines integrity and independence, it is inherently ambiguous as nothing is any longer simply what it is. Mediation is thus always threatened with falling into immediacy. A philosophy such as Hemsterhuis's, which articulates a thinking of mediation, must likewise run across the temptation of immediacy. Indeed, if this temptation were absent, the idea of mediation would be incomplete, it would be able to set itself up as a world in itself, a new world independent of all else (and thus refute and destroy itself qua mediated in the process). Mediation is nothing other than this tension, which Hemsterhuis knows so well, "I conclude that everything visible or sensible is currently in a forced state, since, tending eternally to union, while remaining always composed of isolated individuals, the nature of the all exists eternally in a manifest contradiction with itself" (*EE* 1.85). The "contradiction" of mediacy and immediacy is precisely what keeps mediacy from being a pole in an opposition between mediacy and immediacy in the first place; mediacy never opposes immediacy, but includes it, even if only as the threat of its own foreclosure. Which is to say that, as organic, existence is always opened, and this means, as Novalis would perhaps have it, existence is always stimulated. In the end, to exist means to be stimulated; an "eternal stimulus" holds us in existence, "this stimulus can never cease to be a stimulus – without we ourselves thereby ceasing."¹⁷

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“Coagulated Spirit”?

Hemsterhuis on Matter as Organ and Signature

*Carlos Zorrilla Piña**

ABSTRACT

Franz Baader, an enthusiastic reader of Hemsterhuis, attributed to the latter the claim that the body was coagulated spirit and the corporeal universe a coagulated God. Despite the attribution, an examination of Hemsterhuis' works soon proved that the claim in question was as such nowhere to be found in them. In light of this, most scholars have assumed that Baader simply mistook the source and credited Hemsterhuis with a view that he had actually taken from someone else. Against that reading, this article suggests that though Baader may have indeed gone too far by attributing to Hemsterhuis a turn of phrase which was not his, his reasons for doing so in fact closely followed Hemsterhuis' philosophical views. In that vein, it is further argued that understanding the views which motivated the misattribution can throw an otherwise missing light on Hemsterhuis' philosophical conception of the organ and its mediative role, as well as on the influence which that conception exercised on later thinkers.

Keywords: Hemsterhuis, Franz Baader, organ, matter, signature, mediation

RÉSUMÉ

Franz Baader, lecteur enthousiaste d'Hemsterhuis, attribue à ce dernier l'affirmation selon laquelle le corps est un esprit coagulé et l'univers corporel un Dieu coagulé. Malgré cette attribution, l'examen des œuvres d'Hemsterhuis a rapidement démontré que l'affirmation en question ne s'y trouvait pas. La plupart des chercheurs ont alors supposé que Baader s'était tout simplement trompé de source et avait attribué à Hemsterhuis un point de vue en réalité repris à quelqu'un d'autre. Contre cette lecture, on avance ici l'idée que, même si Baader est effectivement allé trop loin en attribuant à Hemsterhuis une tournure de phrase qui n'était pas la sienne, les raisons pour lesquelles il l'a fait suivent de près les vues philosophiques d'Hemsterhuis. On soutient également qu'une compréhension des raisons ayant motivé cette attribution erronée projette un éclairage qui fait sinon défaut sur la conception philosophique propre à Hemsterhuis de l'organe et de son rôle médiateur, ainsi que sur l'influence exercée par cette conception sur des penseurs ultérieurs.

Mots clés : Hemsterhuis, Franz Baader, organe, matière, signature, médiation

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Of the many signs of François Hemsterhuis’s profound influence on post-Leibnizian German philosophy—he was declared by A.W. Schlegel a “prophet of transcendental idealism,”¹ was translated and popularized by the likes of Herder and Jacobi, enthusiastically read by Lessing and Goethe, and, alongside Plato, considered a favorite source of insight by Novalis²—still perhaps none is more curious than the one which rears its head in Franz Baader’s nature-philosophy and then echoes in Schelling’s thought. This particular vein of influence, however, occurs under the guise of what has generally been understood to be an expression only mistakenly attributed to Hemsterhuis. Indeed, if a footnote in Baader’s 1798 “On the Pythagorean Square in Nature, or on the Four World-Regions” were to be believed, “Hemsterhuis makes use of the somewhat adventurous sounding and yet true expression of calling the body a coagulated spirit [*geronnener Geist*], and the corporeal universe a coagulated god [*geronnener Gott*].”³ The alleged use of at least part of that adventurous expression was soon after lent credit by Schelling, whose 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* registers it in a slightly modified form, declaring namely that Hemsterhuis had called “matter” coagulated spirit.⁴

Only, as past and present readers of both these authors have been quick to point out, the expression ‘coagulated spirit’ is nowhere to be found in Hemsterhuis’s works. In 1852, Franz Hoffmann, student and friend of Baader, made this perfectly clear in his edition of his late teacher’s complete works. Around the same time, a then-much-older Schelling, tacitly confessing to have made his previous claim on nothing except the authority of Baader’s word, drew attention to the same textual absence in his *Presentation of Purely Rational Philosophy* (published posthumously in 1856). He there admits not to have “seen this dictum in any of [Hemsterhuis] writings,” nor to be able therefore to say “whether the coagulated spirit [*der geronnene Geist*] was expressed by *esprit caillé* or *esprit coagulé*,” whereupon, calling to his aid a source older than Hemsterhuis, he concludes the

¹ A. W. Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*, eds. E. Behler, F. Jolles, vol. 1 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), 296.

² See Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. E. Behler *et al.*, vol. 23 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1959–), 40.

³ See Franz Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. F. Hoffmann, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Herrmann Bethmann Verlag, 1851–1860), 262. For an English translation of Baader’s “On the Pythagorean Square in Nature, or on the Four World-Regions”, see *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 3 (2021): 229–250.

⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling, vol. 3 (Stuttgart & Augsburg: J. G. Cotta’scher Verlag, 1856–1861), 453.

expression rather refers to Leibniz’s dynamic account of corporeality.⁵ In our own days, Michael Franz has in somewhat contradictory fashion judged that the expression *geronnener Geist* “evidently” constitutes a sort of usurped trophy with which Baader would have adorned himself, but by no means a real “Hemsterhuis citation.”⁶ And even more recently, Alberto Bonchino has proposed that Baader did not take the expression from Hemsterhuis at all, but rather from the Danish diplomat Karl Heinrich von Gleichen, to whom Baader’s opusculum is dedicated, and to whose 1771 *Metaphysical Heresies* Baader explicitly makes reference elsewhere in his text, including in the footnote where the attribution in question takes place. As Bonchino highlights, von Gleichen had indeed stated that “matter is [...] nothing other than composite spirit [*zusammengesetzter Geist*],” and is this not enough to conclude, Bonchino submits, “that for Baader the most likely source of the syntagma attributed to Hemsterhuis is von Gleichen?”⁷

I think neither the importance of von Gleichen’s work as a source of insight for Baader can be dismissed, nor should one in any way deny the likelihood that his ‘*zusammengesetzter Geist*’ constitutes a factor of what may yet turn out to be Baader’s contraction—indeed coagulation—of several distinct sources which resulted in the ‘*geronnener Geist*’ philosopheme. Still, I believe no less that, despite the otherwise compelling case made, arguing for von Gleichen as Baader’s main source raises questions that are difficult to answer and ends up eclipsing a very real and very important connection

⁵ Schelling’s full remark is worth citing. He says that “Hemsterhuis [...] is supposed to have said: [that] matter is the coagulated spirit; I myself have admittedly not seen this dictum in any of his writings, and can therefore not say how it read in French: whether the coagulated spirit [*der geronnene Geist*] was expressed by *esprit caillé* or *esprit coagulé* or however else. I believe, however, that the expression belongs to a German, and is of older origin. I conclude this from a citation of a work which appeared for the first time in 1725, the *Dilucidations* of the famous Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, whom Friedrich the Great distinguishes as a philosopher in his treatise on German literature. It is there, namely, stated: “I knew a metaphysician whose witty saying was: a body is a compositely coagulated spiritual essence [*zusammengeronnenes geistiges Wesen*]”. The expression probably referred to Leibnizian doctrine...” (Schelling, *Werke*, 11.425) The cited passage appears in Georg Bernhard Bilfinger, *Dilucidationes philosophicae de Deo, anima humana, mundo, et generalibus rerum affectionibus*, (Tübingen, Johann Georg und Christian Gottfried Cotta, 1725), 103. Slightly different from Schelling’s, Bilfinger’s expression is ‘*zusammen geronnenes geistisches Wesen*’.

⁶ Michael Franz. *Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 81–82.

⁷ Alberto Bonchino. *Materie als geronnener Geist. Studien von Franz von Baader in den philosophischen Konstellationen seiner Zeit*, (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), 68 ff. Von Gleichen’s own equivalence statement reads: “I have always associated the idea of force with the word spirit, and finally found that matter consists of nothing but forces. Matter is for me nothing else than a composite spirit, and spirit, the all-being of matter”. Karl Friedrich Freiherr von Gleichen, *Metaphysische Ketzereien oder Versuche über die verborgensten Gegenstände der Weltweisheit und ihre Grundursachen* (1771), 95.

between this philosopheme and Hemsterhuis's thought. Most obvious among those lingering questions: If Baader had really taken the expression from von Gleichen, whom he clearly held in high esteem, why then the attribution to Hemsterhuis—an attribution which, it bears recalling, survived more than one revision (as “On the Pythagorean Square in Nature” was reedited over the years following its original publication)? What about the second part of the adventurous-sounding expression which Baader attributed to Hemsterhuis, namely: that the corporeal universe is a coagulated god, of which no trace whatsoever is to be found in von Gleichen's *Metaphysical Heresies*? And lastly, why would Baader have changed von Gleichen's already German expression ‘*zusammengesetztes Geist*’ into his own ‘*geronnener Geist*’? Does this discrepancy not rather suggest that the term was either taken from elsewhere, or in fact used in order to translate an expression from another language into German for the first time?

With regard to both these latter possibilities, the above-quoted passage from Schelling's last work offers valuable guidance. For one thing, beyond submitting the philosophically plausible hypothesis that the expression should ultimately be read as an encapsulation of Leibniz's dynamic doctrine of corporeality, Schelling also provides a citation which far precedes von Gleichen and which does in fact include the term ‘coagulated’—namely, Bilfinger's “a compositely coagulated spiritual essence.”⁸ Moreover, Schelling also provides a crucial clue leading decisively beyond von Gleichen when he casually submits the French *esprit coagulé* as a possibility for how the expression may have—if at all—occurred in Hemsterhuis. Now, the term *esprit coagulé* cannot as such be found in Hemsterhuis's works any more than the alternative Schelling likewise considers, *esprit caillé*.⁹ In this restricted sense, therefore, Michael Franz is indeed right when he declares that there is no way Baader's expression constitutes an actual citation from Hemsterhuis. It does not. And yet Schelling's conjectured translation nonetheless proves fruitful in two ways. Without meaning to, it first of all evokes an even older and deeper-running source than Leibniz whose influence and presence must

⁸ See footnote 5 above.

⁹ Hemsterhuis rarely uses the term ‘spirit’ (*esprit*) in a sense other than the general one designating societal and cultural tendencies, as occurs when one speaks of the spirit of an era or the spirit of a people (cf. e.g., *EE* 1. 68 ff.; 1.114; 1.23). In order to refer to the immaterial component of the human being, excepting a couple of cases where the sense is rather that of individual élan or vital breath, Hemsterhuis by far privileges the notion of ‘soul’ (*l'âme*). His notion of soul is not that of a mere physiological principle, however, but covers both the physiological and what others would set apart therefrom as the properly spiritual. In this context, an important difference between the notion of soul and spirit as applied to the “coagulated god” part of the syntagma will be touched upon later. For citations to Hemsterhuis's work, see the explanation in the editor's introduction to this special issue.

nonetheless have hovered in front of Baader’s eyes at least as much as the former’s: the alchemical principle of *solve et coagula* and its application to the relation between body and spirit.¹⁰ Secondly, Schelling’s conjecture proves felicitous because it turns out that, when dealing with matter, Hemsterhuis does indeed speak of certain *coagulations* and does indeed point to their crucial importance for a communication between matter and soul—about which more will be said below.

Accordingly, though the proliferation of possible sources for Baader’s expression may admittedly seem to do nothing if not lead us farther away from Hemsterhuis, once peace is made with the fact that ‘coagulated spirit’ may be neither more nor less than a contraction minted by Baader to capture the coming together of different strands of thought, the significance of his attribution of the expression—or *syntagma*, to use Bonchino’s all the more appropriate term—to Hemsterhuis actually grows rather than diminishes. Indeed, if much older sources had already linked body and spirit by way of the operations of coagulation and solution, if Leibniz had already suggested that the body was a lethargic manifestation of sorts of the same active power welling up in the soul, and if Bilfinger and von Gleichen (perhaps among others) had also provided textually closer precedents of the *syntagma* of coagulated spirit than Hemsterhuis ever did, then why did Baader explicitly and deliberately credit it to Hemsterhuis and not to all those seemingly likelier sources? What in Hemsterhuis’s philosophy other than the occurrence of the phrase itself may warrant the attribution?

In light of these questions, I would submit that at least as meaningful as the historiographical chase of a turn of phrase is a philosophical investigation as to whether that phrase’s core idea can indeed be corroborated in Hemsterhuis’s thought, and if so, to what extent and in exactly what way. This paper offers an attempt to do precisely that, though admittedly in incipient terms that cannot lay claim to being anything other than a first exploration of the paths thereby set down. The investigation meanwhile leads us not just to a consideration of Hemsterhuis’s views on the philosophical problem of matter, but thereby inevitably to the latter’s relation to mind and everything which can be said to be immaterial—both human and divine. This, in turn, calls forth another notion—arguably Hemsterhuis’s most meaningful contribution to ontology: the notion of the organ, i.e., of the

¹⁰ Baader’s fascination by and engagement with occultist, hermetic, and alchemical sources is well known. This is not the place to pursue this topic at any considerable length. Suffice to say, Baader’s familiarity with e.g. the 1550 *Rosarium philosophorum* (the second part to *De alchimia opuscula complura veterum philosophorum*, which appeared in print in 1550 in Frankfurt) is manifest in his writings (cf. e.g., *Werke*, 8.353; 2.473; 13.154).

medium or articulation through which the very encounter of the material and the immaterial, the external and the internal, can take place.

In talking about the allure Hemsterhuis's philosophy exercised on Baader and other Romantics, Gabriel Trop recently described Hemsterhuis as:

an agonistic and adventurous thinker, one who simultaneously differentiates and brings into a zone of indifferentiation operations associated with mind and body, [who] insists on a stark distinction between body and soul, [yet] explores conceptual operations—specifically those attributed to the figure of the organ—that integrate these two differentiated domains into an overarching functional framework and bring them into a zone of commensurability with one another.¹¹

Trop's characterization could hardly be more felicitous. Though an inheritor of the stark dualism on the basis of which Modern philosophy had been set on its course by Descartes, Hemsterhuis is indeed a liminal thinker who signals and to an extent lives out the agony of that mode of thinking: a harbinger of the demise of a metaphysics predicated on the illusion of a clean cut distinction between ontological domains. It is as if in Hemsterhuis's thought Cartesian aporias revolving around the point of contact between heterogenous substances refuse to be rolled up into the pineal gland and, breaking out of their would-be containment, rather take center stage under a notion of organ that progressively becomes more and more complex, more and more encompassing, and more and more crucial to Hemsterhuis's entire philosophical project. And if one may finally judge Hemsterhuis's studies on organics not to have once and for all settled the question of the communication between body and soul—but then again, whose philosophy has?—it is nonetheless undeniable that his explorations would go on to pave the way for subsequent, perhaps more daring, advances. He opens up the path but holds back from it: from everything is coil-spring, to everything is seed; or better still: everything organ, through and through...

1. Matters of Attraction

Although by no means operatively absent, in a sense the problem of matter only gradually comes to the forefront of Hemsterhuis's explicit philosophical

¹¹ Gabriel Trop, "Hemsterhuis as Provocation: The German Reception of his Early Writings," in François Hemsterhuis, *Early Writings, 1762–1773*, eds. J. van Sluis and D. Whistler (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 37.

attention. The early 1769 *Letter on Sculpture* refers directly to matter only in the sense of the given raw material, or the manipulable working-stuff of different art forms, e.g., the more or less malleable materials used in painting or in the different kinds of sculpture: *en ronde bosse* and *bas-relief* (see *EE* 1.72 ff). Beyond this commonplace usage of the term, at first no specific attention seems to be given to the questions of what matter’s nature may be and how it may relate to soul. But here, as elsewhere, initial appearances may be deceptive. The very notion of manipulability, or of matter’s amenability to serving the purpose of expressing an idea, will prove to have placed matter in a theoretical constellation whose operations and tensions will eventually lead to the very heart of the issue thanks to the introduction and critical exploration of a key third term: the figure of media or of organs. If one is looking for disclosure on whether an expression linking body and spirit by way of coagulation is plausibly traced back to Hemsterhuis, it is thus to the organ that one must turn. For it is indeed the figure of the organ that dominates Hemsterhuis’s philosophical output from beginning to end, giving it the gravitational center around which Hemsterhuis’s thought revolves as he gradually begins to uncover the subtleties of the communication between substances of a heterogeneous nature, from the inexorability of temporalization, to the irreducibility of the topological distinction between an interior and an exterior side of being, the functional relation between unity and plurality at the heart of informative experience, and to the dynamic of assimilation as a pondered expression of universal unification.

The first element that must be given attention is accordingly that of temporalization, or of the inescapability of time in our experience of the world. The *Letter on Sculpture* is most famous for Hemsterhuis’s introduction of his definition of beauty as an optimizing function: to wit, that “the beautiful in all arts must give us the greatest possible number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time” (*EE* 1.65). In arriving at this definition, Hemsterhuis explicitly focused on the effect or impression made by the experienced object on the subject experiencing it and “decomposed this action into intensity and duration” (*EE* 1.63). The procedure—unquestionably of Newtonian inspiration—thus makes beauty a function of two inversely-related variable parameters: intensity, to be thought as the quantity of the content transmitted to the soul in the experience of the object in question; and duration, or the time it takes for that transmission of content to take place. The prescription that the former be maximal whereas the latter be minimal—or what may reasonably be called the principle of ideational optimization—is introduced on the back of the realization that, while “there is something in our soul that loathes all relation to what we call succession or

duration,” (*EE* 1.67) our soul cannot ever enjoy an instantaneous contemplation of the object of aesthetic appreciation. For Hemsterhuis, this impossibility is as much due to the fact that our experience of the object is inescapably mediated, as well as that the medium through which it can be given, which he calls an organ, is of a limited nature, capable only of a dilated or successive transmission of content.¹² The organ’s imperfect mediation in giving the soul its ideas inevitably checks the soul’s inherent proclivity for atemporality—a notion of Platonic filiation—and makes a would-be instantaneous apprehension of an object’s total intensity into a *desideratum* only asymptotically pursued. The gatekeeper’s toll may be variable; but it is unavoidable. Beautiful is simply that object whose composition agrees with the organ’s own construction in such a way that the limitation can be circumvented as much as it possibly can be, by allowing for intensity to be maximal, while keeping deferment to a minimum. The metaphysical lesson of the beautiful, if we can put it this way, is the inexorability of temporalization: no interiorization of that which is outside the soul can ever occur if not at the price of entangling the soul in the passage of time.

Guided as he is by questions concerning art, however, in which considerations of production are as crucial as those of perception, Hemsterhuis recognizes that the inescapable temporalization and loss of intensity separating the soul from the object cuts two ways. With the declaration that “the first distinct and well-conceived idea by a man of genius, which is replete with the subject he wants to treat, is not only good, but already [stands] well above its expression,” (I, 64) Hemsterhuis extends the application of his principle of ideational optimization beyond cases of internalization to cases of externalization of content as well. Thus, not only does the decomposition of action into intensity and duration come into play whenever an object is taken in as the soul’s representational content; it likewise manifests whenever the soul objectifies a representation it may have by seeking to capture or fix the latter on a physical medium. The artistic execution or realization of a beautiful idea—its materialization, one may well say—is such that it too must transit between domains and in order to do so must likewise pay a toll at the hands of a gatekeeper. In fact, it is precisely in pondering this price to be paid in every artistic execution or realization of an idea, that Hemsterhuis is led to that consideration of the varying tractability of the materials disposed of by different arts which was mentioned at the beginning of the present section. All in all, there is thus an awareness that,

¹² Within the purview of the letter’s inquiry of the visible arts, that limitation is explained by applying the laws of optics to the constitution of our eye.

on the one hand, the plenum that is any existing thing is diminished in its perception or impression due to the mediation of organs, while on the other hand, it is diminished in its production or expression due to the incidence of matter, or the physical medium in and through which that idea acquires an objective subsistence so as to be enjoyed by anyone other than the artist. The *Letter on Sculpture* may not then proceed to an explicit thematization of the relation between matter, mediation, and organs; but it nonetheless will already have set down a clear path in that direction, which later works will more carefully explore.

In summing up that early work, the subsequent 1770 *Letter on Desires* makes no secret of the negative or limiting aspect of mediation and the figure of the organ:

I have proven to you in my preceding [letter] that the soul always seeks the greatest possible number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time, and that what prevents it from being satisfied in this respect lies in the necessity by which it is compelled to use organs and media [...] If the soul could be affected by an object without the means of organs, the time it would take for it to form the idea would be reduced to precisely nothing (*EE* 1.79).

This limiting character of the organ notwithstanding, there is a corresponding positive or enabling aspect which—in opening up his otherwise mainly aesthetic considerations to the broader context of more overtly metaphysical ones—the *Letter on Desires* allows to emerge from the background. In this work, the definition of beauty as the soul’s optimal enjoyment of a maximum possible of ideas of an external object in a minimum possible time, is now reinterpreted as the more or less accomplished attainment of the soul’s desire, which Hemsterhuis understands as the soul’s inherent tendency to seek a “perfect and intimate union with all that is outside of it” (*EE* 1.81). It is in the context of this thematic enlargement, and particularly thanks to matter’s first tentative appearance as itself an object of perception, that the organ’s enabling role will be highlighted. Although professing “perfect ignorance of what matter is”, and cautioning against too readily accepting physics’ pretension to deliver ultimate knowledge in this regard, Hemsterhuis nonetheless concedes that there are certain attributes of matter with which we can familiarize ourselves thanks to the “relation which exists between some effects and our organs” (*EE* 1.79). The intimation is thus that, even if matter is more than we can possibly know, and we would do well not to forget this by reductively rigidifying our conception of it, our organs do allow a certain alethic encounter with it, or a partial yet truthful disclosure of its

being. Hemsterhuis thereby makes clear that, though they may ultimately keep the contact of the soul's essence with that of its desired object from either being instantaneous or ever possibly reaching a complete union, organs are in any case the only means through which an otherwise impossible encounter with alterity can happen at all—at least, and this is yet another Platonic assertion, “in the current state in which the soul is found” (*EE* 1.80). As such, the figure of the organ discharges the role of ontological articulation between the soul and everything that is outside and other to it: not limited to, but importantly including matter. Or to put it differently, the soul's membership to a community of existence from which it would otherwise be cut off is ensured by the communication the organs facilitate for it, imperfect and dilated as that communication may be.

The recognition of the organ's constitutive ambivalence as limiting and enabling in turn opens up theoretical paths which previously had remained unexplored, and which will bring matter's relation to soul into sharper philosophical focus. It is, indeed, on the authority of the evidence given by those few material attributes which are known to our organs that Hemsterhuis ventures the claim that there is a strong analogy between the soul's inherent tendency towards perfect essential union with its external objects of desire and the force of attraction universally displayed by each and every instance of matter (see *EE* 1.79).¹³ In addition, the analogous character of matter and soul receives further support by considering that, just as in matter there is nonetheless an inherent resistance to an otherwise immediate and total surrender to attraction, viz. matter's inertia, so too the soul can exercise a moral directive power over its desires, keeping itself from simply being enslaved by them. By thus subsuming certain properties of matter and soul as the terms of an analogy, Hemsterhuis accordingly pushes beyond the commonplace acknowledgment that material conditions are at the root of affections in our soul, as well as, contrarily, that we are capable of translating psychological states into material consequences. He rather gestures at an underlying operational commonality of these two domains of existence according to which matter and soul would not simply coexist and impinge on one another, but they would each operate in ways which attest to a certain essential kinship of being—minimal as it may be—rather than to a merely accidental coincidence at a given locale. This minimal kinship is admittedly

¹³ See *EE* 1.79. Hemsterhuis's metric for the degree of attainment of union as a function of variables of time and intensity suffices to see how the asserted analogy carries over to Newtonian mechanics, according to which the rate of change (increase or decrease in time) in momentum (or intensity) is equal to the net force—in this case of attraction—operating over a given material existent.

not explored in more detail at this stage, but—as will be seen in due time—it already sets the foundation on the basis of which the rapprochement between the soul and the body will be pursued, from mere analogy to organic signature...

Lest the above kinship be exaggerated, however, it is worth emphasizing that the use of analogy as a conjoining operator points as clearly to a proximity between the *relata* being compared as to an irreducible distance holding them apart. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the declaration of the analogy between material attraction and psychological proclivity for union goes hand in hand with the introduction of a notional pair that will prove of great importance to Hemsterhuis’s account, even while it destabilizes its otherwise neatly drawn schematic: the categories of homogeneity and heterogeneity between substances. Still in the *Letter on Desires*, Hemsterhuis says: “In regard to the objects that the soul may desire, they are either homogeneous or heterogeneous to its essence; and the vivacity of desires, or rather the degree of the attractive force, will be consistently measured by the degree of homogeneity of the thing desired” (*EE* 1.80). Needless to say, the characterization of two substances as either homogenous or heterogeneous is a qualitative one, and Hemsterhuis’s submission that the extent to which the desire for union between substances can take place depends on their degree of homogeneity, amounts to a recognition that, while universal, the unifying desire coursing through mindful existence is not therefore invariable throughout.¹⁴ With words reminiscent of the Platonic erotic ascent of souls of the *Symposium*, Hemsterhuis thus submits that:

One will love a beautiful statue less than one’s friend, one’s friend less than one’s mistress, and one’s mistress less than the Supreme Being. It is because of this that religion makes greater enthusiasts than love, love more than friendship, and friendship more than desire for purely material things. (*EE* 1.80)

Thought from the subjective standpoint of one’s soul qua source of desire, there is accordingly an implied arrangement of substances within the community of existence along a spectrum of variable degrees of

¹⁴ This is not unlike how, according to Newtonian mechanics, all matter exercises a universal force of attraction on all other matter, but the magnitude of this force changes under different circumstances. The key difference, of course, is that the criterion determining the variable degree of intensity is purely quantitative in the latter case—the amount of mass of the bodies in play and the distance separating them—while qualitative in the former—the homogeneity or heterogeneity of desiring and desired substance.

homogeneity / heterogeneity.¹⁵ It is less important at this point to determine how that spectrum is thought—whether as a continuum exhausting all intermediate values, or as a series with discrete points kept apart by regular or irregular intervals—and more important to insist on the crucial fact that Hemsterhuis nonetheless includes matter within the purview of existents subject to desire. Purely material things—as he explicitly calls them—may well stand at the very end of the spectrum, opposite the soul, but they are not therefore untouched by the soul’s universal tendency to union, and so not themselves beyond exercising their attractive power on the soul, if admittedly less based on a criterion of quantity and more on a subjective criterion of amenability to the soul. This twofold fact—that we desire material things in addition to immaterial ones, and that material things may attract immaterial ones as well as material ones—is only apparently trivial. Thought through the lens of the ontological picture of universal unification which Hemsterhuis is beginning to sketch, it suggests that the heterogeneity of soul and matter may be maximal—in the precise sense that nothing other than matter could possibly be ascertained as being still less homologous to soul than matter—but it still cannot be total, in the sense that they would be incapable of a certain overlap or communicative fusion over and beyond their mere impact and impulsion of one another.¹⁶

Thus, much in line with the assertion of an analogy of properties between matter and soul, the qualitative spectrum of homogeneity / heterogeneity which Hemsterhuis deploys on the basis of that analogy likewise points to the all-important fact that Hemsterhuis’s metaphysical picture is not as stark a dualism as one may otherwise believe it to be. Matter and soul stand directly opposed to one another, but they crucially do so on opposite ends of a spectrum held together by a common tendency to unity. Or to put it into alternative terms: matter and soul are indeed polar opposites within the field of existence. But this entire field, with its polar opposites included, hovers between the only hypothetically reachable extremes of absolute opposites, whereas the opposites which appear within the thema-

¹⁵ An important thing to recognize at this point is that *all* relations which the soul may entertain are mediated, and not simply those between the soul and its most heterogenous objects of desire. This is evident, for example, from the consideration of our relations to other human beings and the impossibility of a perfect union (see *EE* I.80). In what follows, however, we will focus on the role of the organ qua mediating—i.e. joining and separating—element between the material and the immaterial.

¹⁶ The recognition that there is a difference between maximal and total heterogeneity is what leads Hemsterhuis, some years later, to claim that: “two things cannot have relationships with each other without having some homogeneous or homologous aspect in common” (*EE* 2.96).

tizable reach of the field itself stand already at a remove from those hypothetic extremes, and hence, on at least that count, closer to one another. While the conviction of “the heterogeneity of the soul and the body” (*EE* 1.97) will lose none of its validity in the years to come,¹⁷ the awareness that ontological opposition within the field of thematizable existence cannot be conceived as absolute does nothing if not grow in Hemsterhuis’s middle works, i.e., in the much more ambitious *Letter on Man and his Relations*, from 1772, with its subsequently appended “Clarifications,” as well as in the dialogue *Sophylus, or on Philosophy*, which appeared in 1778.

2. Socratic Consolations

“All that is passive, is: I sense, thus I am passive; therefore I am” (*EE* 2.48; my translation).¹⁸ With this playful variation on the Cartesian dictum, proffered by Euthyphro at the beginning of the *Sophylus*, Hemsterhuis proposes that we begin philosophy anew—not, as he says, in the sense of jettisoning all previous lessons and discovered truths, but rather in the sense of finding the angular stone from which those truths which make up the true system can quickly be recovered from one’s own common sense and laid out in their correct relations to one another. This proposed point of departure aligns itself with his conviction that, though eternal and active of its own, the soul’s realization of its own existence—if not its existence itself—is consequent on the reaction it feels by means of things outside itself (see *EE* 1.96). The conviction is as important because it does away with a sort of purist or overly rationalistic doctrine of the soul, rather circumscribing all possible thematization of the self to the area of its encounter with alterity, as it is because it precisely thereby evokes that with which alone the soul can become self-aware, thus recasting passivity as a reliable indication that there are, besides one’s own soul, other things with which existence is shared, and which stand as the actual causes of ideas in us. Staying all the same true to

¹⁷ In fact, Hemsterhuis not only stands firm by his conviction regarding this heterogeneity, but devises ingenious proofs for it, to the point that he claims to have “demonstrated that the nature of the velleity is directly contrary and repugnant to what we know of the essential qualities of matter” (*EE* 1.94 ff; *EE* 2.55). Whatever theoretical *rapprochement* between matter and the immaterial may be operated by Hemsterhuis is therefore one which clearly does not efface the radical difference keeping them apart, but which nonetheless manages to make their communication plausible.

¹⁸ The otherwise very accurate English translation of the Edinburgh edition shows a slight yet important alteration of Hemsterhuis’s words, which I prefer to avoid here. In the original we find: “*Tout ce qui est passif, est: je sens; ainsi je suis passif: par conséquent je suis.*” See *Œuvres philosophiques de F. Hemsterhuis*, ed. Jansen, 2 vols. (Paris: L. Haussmann Imprimeur-Libraire, 1809), 1.293.

both the *Letter on Sculpture* and the *Letter on Desires*, Hemsterhuis once again underscores that the ideas which the soul may form of things outside are not, and can never be, those things themselves. For the experience of those things, on which our acquisition of the idea depends, is always a mediated one, occurring by way of organs. Whatever access or cognitive possession of the essence in question we may have thus occurs in such a way that time and composition must intervene: i.e., in a manner such that the total intensity of the thing's action upon the soul is broken apart and dosed along a given duration, whereby something of its vivacity is inevitably muted—quite literally: lost in translation.

As if this were not sufficiently unsettling in epistemological terms, beginning with the *Letter on Man and his Relations*, Hemsterhuis furthermore submits the thesis that our five senses are like a drop in the ocean of an “infinite progression of organs which would make known an infinite progression of faces of the universe” (*EE* 1.103). Already at a mediated remove from the things through which we come to encounter both the world and ourselves, we thus now learn that there are “faces of the universe that are not turned towards our organs,” (*EE* 1.89) and so that it is true of each essence we encounter that it can have “a thousand ways of being that are unknown to me” (*EE* 2.49). The properties we assign to an essence—for example to matter—do not constitute an exhaustive list of determinations which would finally pinpoint its uniquely possible way of being, but rather a reflection of the specific organs through which that essence and we ourselves can in fact come to an informative encounter: can overlap ontologically as well as epistemologically. One may rightly trace a Spinozist vein in this intimation that human beings are only privy to a subset of the attributes or faces of the universe, while the greater bulk of the latter remains turned away from them: in no sense less real, yet constitutively beyond their possibility of access and encounter. Or perhaps, recalling Schlegel's touting of Hemsterhuis as a forerunner of transcendental idealism, one may counter that the latter's philosophy already leaves all *sub specie aeternitatis* philosophizing behind in favor of a proto-Copernican turn of sorts, since for him matter is not simply understood as an attribute in itself but rather as the result of the encounter of our own finite being with another finite essence with which we share existence.¹⁹ Hemsterhuis himself, meanwhile, would surely

¹⁹ This accompanies a subtle, yet significant, change in Hemsterhuis's understanding of matter, and of its standing *vis-à-vis* the totality of possible being. Whereas in previous works Hemsterhuis had considered matter virtually synonymous to the essence which is partially known, in the middle works matter rather becomes that part of essence which is known. In other words, rather than affirming that the human being knows only some attributes of

downplay any affiliation other than to his patron, Socrates, and, by turning to our own human depths, at once humbly call for an acknowledgment of our limits, while confidently demanding that those limits be transposed in the direction of new, if now self-aware, knowledge: an ignorance thus genuinely rendered *docta* (see *EE* 2.47 ff, 2.57). We must not, after all, renounce our “right, so to speak, to aspire to knowledge of the truth” (*EE* 1.90); nor should we come to doubt that “something we watch, we hear, we touch, is, among other things, really what it appears to us to be” (*EE* 2.49). The question, of course, is how such confidence in the disclosure of our senses can be maintained in the midst of so encircling a darkness; and quite particularly, what refinement or enlargements the notion of the mediating organ must undergo such that it can support the transposition in question.

There are three main pillars which support Hemsterhuis’s Socratic epistemic optimism. First, preempting any skeptical undermining of knowledge on account of the possible distortion imported by way of the mediation which is inevitably involved in the formation of ideas, Hemsterhuis offers the consideration that, even if our experience cannot pierce through its conditions of mediation and disclose essences themselves such as they are, the constancy of this incapacity in fact guarantees a fidelity in our ideal representation, “at least in relation to the order of things” (*EE* 2.48). Indeed, as long as whatever loss, interference, or sensual noise there may be in the mediation is kept constant as the soul considers different objects, then, regardless of how inaccessible those things qua essences may be, “exactly the same” (*EE* 2.49) set of relations must hold between the ideas the soul gets of them as it holds between the things themselves. This guarantees that, provided of course they are properly drawn, the inferences I extract from reasoning on the order of ideas carry over truthfully to the order of things.²⁰ The second pillar of Hemsterhuis’s epistemological confidence, a bit more inconspicuous than the others, consists in the ontological application of the principle of non-contradiction to the classic categorial pair of a substance and

matter but not its essence, Hemsterhuis begins to say that matter is essence to the extent that it is sensibly amenable to being known by the human being. And whereas before matter basically made up the entirety of the universe, albeit with the exclusion of souls, it later begins to be presented as likely only a minimal portion of all possible being. This difference is advanced tentatively at first, drawing attention to it precisely by correcting himself several times in quick succession: “matter, or rather essence” (*EE* 2.52). He will nonetheless finally state: “All that we call matter is just an infinitely small part of all that is essence” (*EE* 2.53).
²⁰ Hemsterhuis submits a pragmatic consideration as proof of this: were truths not extrapolatable from the order of ideas to that of things, no technological design aimed at the manipulation of nature would ever be possible, since the *idea* of what effects would follow from a given envisioned state of affairs would never actually be corresponded by the real production of those effects by way of the physical production of the design. See *EE* 2.49.

its attributes. In both the *Letter on Man* as well as in *Sophylus*, Hemsterhuis makes clear that even if one cannot know all the attributes or properties of a given essence, departing from the basis of the few ones which are known, one can likewise be sure that the essence in question cannot have attributes which would be incompatible with them.²¹ Here too, therefore, by pondering that which we cannot possibly know, our knowledge of what we can know is greatly increased and buttressed. And thirdly—and in fact most importantly, since the previous two depend on it—Hemsterhuis’s defense in the face of would-be skeptics involves an enlargement of the conception of the organ such that it comes to encompass all the intervening factors between the knowing soul and the known object; or more specifically, such that it encompasses not just the subjective receptor of a given action but also the objective vehicle of that action: “not only the eye that sees, but also the light reflected from the object; not only the ear that hears, but also the air set in oscillation by the movements of the object” (*EE* 1.89). This notion of the organ as both subjective and objective may have arguably dawned in previous works, but it is thematized for the first time in the *Letter on Man*. And given that it is mainly on the basis of its corollaries that Baader’s attribution of the syntagma of coagulated spirit rests, it is worth exploring it in more detail below.

3. The Nerve of the Question

By making the objective vehicle as well as the subjective receptor count as organ—the light as much as the eye; the oscillating air as much as the ear—Hemsterhuis purports to secure a fusing of the subjective and objective horizons which would ensure that the interaction of two separate, yet mediated substances can be informative and truth-preserving, even if partial

²¹ In fact, the above conclusion—that what we sense must be, among other things, such as we sense it—is immediately preceded by this application of the principle of non-contradiction: “if we pay attention to the fact that a thing, which is such as it is, cannot have another way of being that would result in it not being what it is, we clearly see that something we watch, we hear, we touch, is, among other things, really what it appears to us to be” (*EE* 2.49). In the *Letter on Man*, the declaration is even more explicit: “it is perfectly impossible for anything to have two contradictory essential properties, that is to say, that matter be both capable of figure and not capable of figure, extended as well as non-extended, etc., at the same time” (*EE* 1.97). The argument follows the structure of the classic *modus ponendo tollens*: the affirmation of one of the terms of an exclusive disjunction of itself implies the negation of the other term of the disjunction. A given essence can be either extended or non-extended. If my eyes show me that it is extended, then I can safely conclude that it is not also non-extended. And even while acknowledging that other organs may reveal other as yet unknown attributes of the same essence, I can be sure that none of those attributes would imply the essence’s non-extension.

and perspectival with regard to the objects of cognitive intention. If the entire interfacial field of contact between one substance and another falls under the figure of the organ, then the separation or intervening expanse between them is in principle saturated by the medium of their communication, thereby precluding any real risk of dis-communication.²² While it would thus remain true that an essence has innumerable ways of being which must remain unknown to me, provided no distortion by means of faulty inferences were imported, the thing could not possibly keep itself from truthfully disclosing to me those manners of being through which it and I are in fact connected; it could not possibly cause in me “another idea than that which I have of it” (*EE* 2.49). This is, therefore, what secures the “analogy between things and ideas,” (*EE* 2.49) on the basis of which, then, in collaboration with the two previously mentioned pillars, the sameness of relations between our representation of the world and world itself can be staked, and our practical navigation of the latter ensured. It is likewise this subjective-objective enlargement of the organ which explains Hemsterhuis’s total trust in isolated truths and his characterization of error not so much as arising from misperception, as rather from the careless “arrangement, [...] the composition of truths” (*EE* 2.47). To what extent Hemsterhuis in fact purports to secure a continuous medium of communication through his idiosyncratic understanding of the organ as both subjective and objective is clear in his submission that in considering a relation between essences—in the *Sophylus*: an observer and a cube (see *EE* 2.49)—one can consider the terms of the relation as either: on one end, the observing soul alongside the eye and the light and, on the other end, the observed cube; or else, on one end, the observing soul, and, on the other side, the cube alongside the light and the eye through which that light reaches the soul. It is indeed as if Hemsterhuis wanted to conjure away the problematic gap between the knower and known object by leaving it as little space as possible to span, and then by shifting it back and forth between the minimal crevices where it could still take refuge.

²² Admittedly, Hemsterhuis vacillates in this respect, at times clearly suggesting the organ is inclusive of the objective vehicle of the action (cf. *EE* 1.89, 1.93), at times nonetheless drawing a distinction between them, though without ceasing to emphasize the need for their analogy (cf. *EE* 2.58). I take this vacillation to be indicative of the unresolved tensions in Hemsterhuis’s organics stemming from the fact that he still tries to draw a clear cut distinction between matter and the immaterial, as though these two were types of existences which could occur in their purity—the one merely reactive though incapable of intrinsic activity, the other the only source of activity—rather than, as will later be the case in the philosophies of Baader and Schelling, as factors of existence which both pervade the entirety of the field of existence, if in varying relative preponderance in the different existents which make up that field.

Closer inspection, however, reveals the problem of the transition between the objective and the subjective to have been merely blurred out of focus through such maneuvers, but not yet resolved. For the problem is not really that of bridging what materially belongs to the subject and what materially belongs to the object, but precisely that of bridging that which in the subject is material with what however is immaterial—namely: the body and the soul. Structurally reminiscent of the ever-recurring philosophical conundrum of the third man, the introduction of an intermediary between substances previously declared maximally heterogeneous—whatever the intermediary’s nature may be—begs the question of how a third element could at once offer the minimal commonality with both the substances it is to connect, without itself suffering the same break which it is supposed to remedy in its midst. Barring the introduction of some as-yet-unexplained procedure or new operation of conjunction, the introduction of this intermediary would either simply duplicate the disjointedness on either end, or else it would turn out only to have displaced it to that side of the opposition with which it itself has no homogeneity.

Hemsterhuis is too lucid a thinker not to see this. He knows that on the side of the physical medium in which the object finds itself, the communication with the object may well be explained by recourse to pure mechanism—or, if this notion is too restrictive, then to a concatenation linking causes and effects in a field wherein no break in homogeneity comes into play. The immersed globe he considers as an example in the *Sophylus*, for instance, creates waves in the fluids of its immersion by means of motion, and these waves are then gradually transmitted, *pars ad partem*, throughout each entire fluid, whereupon they ostensibly meet and affect the respective sense organ or receptor of a knower likewise immersed in that same fluid. That this transmitted effect can thus cover the expanse and reach the material or bodily component of the knower’s organ is not at all surprising. The real question is obviously how it makes the transition from the still material receptor—the eye, skin, ear, etc.—to the eminently immaterial soul. This is the crux; this is the still unbridged abyss which no shifting or maneuvering can conjure away. One can indeed admit Hemsterhuis’s distinction between “essences which can manifest their relations to us by means of our [sensory] organs; and [...] others which cannot so manifest” (*EE* 2.53). But unless one were ready to renounce our own constitution as beings of a centaur nature, both with a material body and an immaterial soul, the pretense that interactions falling under the first case would be any less problematic would turn out to be highly naïve the moment it were extended to cover not only relations between physical objects themselves but also their intake and

subsequent representational ideation by the soul. And though the dialogue is a bit ambiguous on this particular, in fact the final question keeping Sophylus and Euthyphro apart towards the end of the inquiry, to wit: whether “it is possible for an essence, by a quality that cannot be made manifest to us by our organs, to be able to act on essences that can be made manifest to us by our organs, such that this [second type of] essence manifests [the first type] to us by means of our organs” (*EE* 2.59)—this is a question which covers as much a would-be exteriorizing action of the soul on the body as well as a would-be interiorizing action of body on soul.²³

With his more comprehensive—subjective *and* objective—conception of the organ, Hemsterhuis has therefore imported the question of how analogy may provide an actual communication between its antipodes into the very core of our experience in and of the world. This question—how action can take place between the heterogenous substances of body and soul, regardless of what the direction of the action may be—is indeed the question on which everything stands or falls. For unless it can be explained how the immaterial soul can impress and receive action on and from the material universe, one can never definitively refute the reductive physicalist hypothesis that everything may finally consist of “subtle active matter” (*EE* 2.53)—too subtle to be detected *yet matter still*—and so that our very awareness of ourselves and our inner life as beings endowed with soul may ultimately be nothing more than an epiphenomenal occurrence. Yet if the body, being material, is indeed as heterogenous to the soul as Hemsterhuis had declared it to be, then what exactly could ever make it—or at least the parts of the body which take the form of organs or constitute factors of the organ²⁴—capable of functioning as a vehicle for the translation of action between the otherwise maximally heterogenous matter and soul? How can the organ ensure that by making good on their analogous dimension, heterogeneous essences may be at least minimally *assimilated* into one another, “propagat[ing] their reciprocal actions,” (*EE* 2.57) and thereby becoming equally capable of marveling at the sculpture’s beauty, of transforming the idea of a pocket watch into a

²³ The accusation Schelling would levy in the Introduction to his 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* would otherwise prove incisive: “You may insert as many intermediate links as you like between the affection of your nerves, your brain, etc., and the representation of an external thing; but you only deceive yourselves. For the transition from the body to the soul cannot be continuous according to your own conceptions, but only through a leap, which you nevertheless pretend to want to avoid” (*Werke*, 2.26).

²⁴ The body is said to be only known by the soul “through the external action of the body upon its own organs” (*EE* I.81)—an important reminder that organs cannot simply be taken as synonymous with the body, which here appears not so much as the means of experience but rather as the object thereof, and so necessarily to be distinguished from the organs, at least on some irreducible level.

ticking reality, of articulating the humble disclosures of five senses into a precise geometry of the heavens, and of moving entire armies on the face of the earth with the invisible power of a word?²⁵ In the *Letter on Man*, Hemsterhuis's had remarked that: "there is perhaps but one organization, among the faces of the universe which we know, to which [the soul] can attach itself to such an extent that it can act on this organization; but once attached to its organs, everything which is homogenous to these organs becomes organ for it."²⁶ Ultimately, therefore, everything rests on the possibility of embodiment, radically understood, i.e., on giving an account of how a putatively eternal soul can attach itself (*s'attacher*) to the few changing faces of the universe which are indeed analogously turned towards it.

Hemsterhuis's response to this crucial question lays the basis on which credibility for Baader's attribution of the '*geronnener Geist*' syntagma can be staked. But let us proceed step by step. On the one hand, Hemsterhuis admits that there is no ultimate answer to the question of how matter could act on soul or vice versa. He states that there are causes in nature whose analogy with their effects cannot but remain completely veiled in our current situation and even mocks the overly pretentious philosopher that "seeks blindly and occupies himself eagerly in ultimately useless investigations." (*EE* 2.60) At the same time, however, he shows his staple Socratic perseverance, seeking "so far as it is permitted to man," (*EE* 2.60) to conceive how this communication may possibly take place. Returning to previous inklings in the direction of the impossibility that their heterogeneity amount to an absolute disparity of being, he reasons that if the soul and the body act on each other reciprocally, then it can only be because they "must also have in common one or more qualities, modifications, or manners of being that we do not know of" (*EE* 2.60). Ultimately, therefore, he stakes the possibility of communication between body and soul on the commonality that subsists despite their maximal heterogeneity. Of this commonality, two things of particular importance can be remarked. First, its *specificity* and *locality*. In Hemsterhuis's view, it is not all matter that supports awareness and ideation on the basis of the intake of data, but only certain parts of material existents, and only of material existents of a certain kind.²⁷ The second proviso is that,

²⁵ Euthyphro's consideration against a reductive physicalism—a purely mass-based materialism—is as simple as it is powerful: "To move thirty cannons, it still takes a real force of fifty thousand pounds at least. [...] The prince doesn't transmit this force from Europe to Asia, I think. [...] He sends one ounce of paper, and the artillery moves..." (*EE* 2.55).

²⁶ My translation; see Jansen's edition of the *Œuvres philosophiques*, 1.163.

²⁷ Hemsterhuis does admit that animals have a soul, and even suggests that the overly stark distinctions we make between animal souls and our own may be due to our vanity and incapacity to adopt the animal's experiential standpoint. (*EE* 1.98) But he is far from

in order that it truly concern the one essence as much as the other rather than constitute a mere extension of only one side, then the common manner of being allowing for communication would manifest in each case under the overarching character of each of the respective antipodes it links: soul and body. What exactly this means in terms of Hemsterhuis’s studies on the organ can be read from the declaration with which he virtually concludes the *Sophylus*:

The relation that exists between a nerve or the brain and the soul derives—in accordance with this demonstration—from a quality, a modification, or a way of being that is common to the soul and to the nerve or the brain. The nerve or the brain, as nerve or brain, is a composite essence. The qualities which it may have in common with the soul exist in it as a composite, since otherwise the soul could itself act on all matter that was neither nerve nor brain; and this is not the case. (*EE* 2.60)

It is worth unpacking what exactly is being proposed here. Hemsterhuis puts forth that the commonality between body and soul which allows for their interaction is such that whereas its occurrence in the soul is unitary, the body presents the same property but only in virtue of the specific manner in which it is composed, i.e., in which its multiple parts are arranged. He thereby ventures an answer to the question of how the soul could be attached to a given side of the corporeal or material universe by suggesting that the indivisible soul attaches itself to those precise points of the material universe in which it happens that a certain specific composition of parts mirrors one of the properties the soul possesses. On the side of the soul, that property subsists in a unitary, undivided, manner; whereas on the side of the discrete body in which the attachment takes place the subsistence of the property is only possibly showcased if the multiple parts of matter which make up the

suggesting that an ensoulment—even if minimal—is common to any and all instances of matter. In this respect, he stands decisively on the side of Newton and later Kant, and opposite the likes of Leibniz, Herder, Baader, and Schelling. His very declaration that “everything is coil-spring” (*EE* 1.100) attests to his view of matter as that of an ultimately inert essence—one admittedly tensile and reactive, but precisely therefore still ultimately passive, and without an intrinsic source of activity. On this particular, cf. the contrast drawn between the coil-spring and the will. (*EE* 1.98) Attempts to vivify Hemsterhuis’s conception of matter could be made on the basis of his seeming attribution of seminal quality to it (see *EE* 1.101). But that attribution does not apply in an intrinsic or constitutive level to all matter. And, more importantly, the crux of the issue is that Hemsterhuis makes force into something which inheres on matter rather than constitutes matter; and so if one takes a closer look at his account of the first seeds that would allow for material formation (see *EE* 1.100 ff.) one can very well see that form always comes as a result of purely inert bits of matter being set in motion extrinsically rather than intrinsically.

corporeal existent are disposed in relation to one another in such a way that they extensively instantiate that which in the soul is cyphered in purely intensive terms. In contrast to the extensively disposed material composite, pure intensity represents a well of essence which does not entail juxtaposition, and hence speaks of an interior dimension of being, an ontological reserve beyond the externality of space. And so the organ, as that which links domains of existence and thereby articulates the subsistence of the universe as both physical and intellectual, would accordingly constitute the functional articulating point of a specific manner of being as occurring on the one hand unitarily in an inner spiritual region, and on the other as extended and divided into parts in the external material region. In a closely related context, Leif Weatherby puts it thus: “the organ is the integral and simultaneous differential of the opposed tendencies of the inner and the outer. It homogenizes and separates, isolates and causes interaction.”²⁸ Neither pure body nor pure soul, hovering as the attractive midpoint between extremes, the organ would thus enable essence to complicate itself—quite literally—into an interplay between a real and an ideal, a physical and a spiritual, manifestation of its power to be. And here Hemsterhuis’s oldest insight would come back once again, as it would be the operations of translation between these two domains which would constitute the passage of time: a *translation* which, as it will turn out, is to be understood in more ways than one...

The simple yet powerful insight that Hemsterhuis lastingly associates to the philosophical notions of organ and organicity is thus that they consist in the functional correspondence between interior unity and exterior multiplicity such that a channel between these two domains is secured, and the possibility for informative action between them can be upheld. Of course, the notion that the soul’s attachment to the corporeal universe happens by means of the specific disposition of parts of material existents inevitably opens up the question: how are specific material configurations achieved such that souls may attach to them? How can matter form itself into certain configurations whose specific composition (i.e., whose specific disposition of parts) mirrors and gives expression to an informatively complex and yet mereologically simple property of the unitary and indivisible soul? It is thus no coincidence that it is in the *Letter on Man*, just as he was also beginning to ponder how the soul could attach itself to the universe, that Hemsterhuis had first begun to explore the key question concerning matter’s capacity for

²⁸ Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ. German Romanticism Between Leibniz and Marx* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 224.

formation.²⁹ Regrettably, a more detailed exploration of Hemsterhuis’s attempts to account for material formation—to which belong his at times equivocal and changing elucidation of the dynamics of attraction, inertia, and centrifugal force—lies among the many forking paths which the larger avenue of this investigation must for now leave unexplored. Even so, however, certain passing remarks cannot be avoided.

Relying once again on the categories of homogeneity and heterogeneity, though this time applied to matter itself, Hemsterhuis submits that the “first seeds of all physical individuals” lie in a principle of regularity which comes to be when the homogenous parts of matter, by means of the unifying force of attraction / inertia, coalesce to form a lasting gravitational center. In Hemsterhuis’s own words, material individuals thus arise through “the first coagulation [*première coagulation*] of a certain number of homogeneous and uniform parts” (*EE* 1.101). There must however be something to keep this coagulating power of the homogenous from simply reducing the entire universe to a single mass, and so, against the attractive force which pulls matter together to a common center, Hemsterhuis postulates that heterogeneous parts of matter have been impressed³⁰ with a “centrifugal force” which, when pondered with the centripetal pull of attraction, leads to the arrangement of each material individual, and ultimately of the entire material universe, into formations not unlike those of “a planet which orbits its sun” (*EE* 1.101). Thus, by way of the dynamic arrangement of its homogenous and heterogeneous parts and forces, matter would be able to “produce [...] every transition we remark in the modifications of the individuals [the universe] contains” (*EE* 1. 101), quite literally organizing itself, i.e., locally

²⁹ That question is skirted in the *Sophylus*, but returns all the more forcefully in the dialogue *Aristaeus, or on the Divinity*, where it is in fact for the first time thematized explicitly under the notion of ‘the general tendency towards organization’, understood both as the constitution of organs, but also more broadly in terms of generation, i.e., as the “firm and steady march of the parts of the universe to attain the formation of a substance” (*EE* 2.74). See *EE* 2.80, where Hemsterhuis speaks of an “organic principle” and an “organic march” of the universe.

³⁰ Needless to say, this impression of motion is of divine origin, and here Hemsterhuis’s theory of material formation comes together with his view that the universe is in a “forced state” of multiplicity (see *EE* 1.85) the direct cause of which is God. This (in this sense) seamless transition between God and creature is what enables Hemsterhuis to conclude from the “prodigiously transcendent and profound” geometry of the eye (see *EE* 1.103) to God qua intelligent author of the universe. Thus, Hemsterhuis’s philosophy is susceptible to the same critique which can also be levelled, *mutatis mutandis*, against Leibniz’s: that the way in which it sets God and the universe in relation to one another impinges on the possibility of nature’s autonomy and matter’s intrinsic formative capacity. It would be Herder—and after him Baader and Schelling, among others—who, seeking to explain formation from the dynamic of natural principles alone would first articulate an account of organicity as arising in a thoroughly natural manner: neither randomly, nor as an imposition of either transcendental or transcendent source.

configurating itself to form those specific corporeal dispositions which, by exhibiting a certain commonality with soul, would allow the latter to attach itself to the objective universe to such an extent as to practically navigate it. Put together with Hemsterhuis's aforementioned views on embodiment, this means that the material and the spiritual sides of the universe are connected to each other only by means of the orbital revolutions its parts carry out. And if, on top of this, it is true that "in any composition which has a certain end for its goal, the ideal must necessarily precede reality," (*EE* 2.49)³¹ then matter's relation to that other domain of being begins indeed to suggest itself as that of a spatially extended and composite expression to the unity which underwrites and dictates its composition from within, as though this unity were the central idea which sets the pace of the *motio translationis* of the orbiting externality. Were we further to pair the fact that the mark of inertia is to keep every revolution from being instantaneous³² with the previously staked insight that the conversions between central intensity and peripheral extensity begins with a material coagulation and entail the emergence of time, then the coming together of all theoretical strands would near its end. Not only would Plato have approvingly smiled at this confirmation that time indeed is the "moving image of eternity" (*Timaeus* 37d); but Baader, in any case, would not have failed to take notice.

4. The Coagulation of Spirit

Let us now return to the point from which we set off: Baader's attribution of the syntagma of '*coagulated spirit*' to Hemsterhuis. Having laid the basis for a better-informed assessment of the plausibility of that attribution, it is now worth citing Baader at length and considering, even if cursorily, the context in which his attribution comes. Students of Baader may recall the fact that, following on the advances of his 1797 "Contributions to Elementary-Physiology," Baader's "On the Pythagorean Square in Nature" works to mark the difference between the efficient, motive forces of repulsion and attraction and the substantial ground force of gravity. In contrast to the other

³¹ See the following remark, from *Aristaeus*: "I will make two further remarks: first, where an organisation occurs, there appears a goal and consequently a determinate limit; secondly, where a goal appears, some ideal seems to have to precede the real" (*EE* 2.74).

³² I refer here to Kepler, forerunner of all modern variations of ontological dynamics, who submitted that if there were no *vis inertiae* to be overcome by the *vis motrix* which brings about the movement of celestial bodies, their revolutions would happen instantaneously. The *vis inertiae*, however, came to those bodies by reason of their very matter (*ratione suae materiae*). See Johannes Kepler, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. Max Caspar and Walter von Dyck, vol. 7 (München: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1938–2017), 296.

two efficient forces, Baader claims gravity subsists at an internal remove from the spatial externality of material existence and constitutes the unifying medium and “common ground of their definite and persistent presence.”³³ To that extent, he submits it plays the role of an “interiority analogous to that of the stuff of our inner sense in every corporeal configuration.”³⁴ It is in referring to the motive forces of repulsion and attraction, specifically in contrast to the ground force of gravity and the fourth, actualizing, principle, that Baader approvingly refers to von Gleichen’s designation of these forces as “half-forces [*Halb-Kräfte*]”—since, after all, they make evident nature’s polarity, i.e., its *dichotomy* or division in two. Immediately thereafter, no longer drawing from von Gleichen but explicitly as a supplement to what the latter has to say concerning the question of spirit, Baader adds:

The concept of a spirit in contrast to the body (as only its negative) is that of the undivided, unpartitioned, i.e., unextended unity, in contrast to the divided, separated, extended one. — In this sense, Hemsterhuis makes use of the somewhat adventurous sounding and yet true expression of calling the body a coagulated spirit, and the corporeal universe a coagulated god. Since every action is immediately preceded by a synthesis of the elements or forces, the essence that is extended within itself necessarily experiences a suspension, and it must first overcome the resistance that opposes the totality or congruence of all its individual forces. This *solutio continui* must therefore be accompanied by pain, and is actually for us the suffering of time.³⁵

In light of the considerations which have preceded, it does not seem to me unjustified to conclude that while the application of the infamous *geronnener Geist* syntagma to Hemsterhuis represents a textual license on Baader’s part—a contraction of insights at times dispersed and at times only incipiently presented—it is a license which is nonetheless taken entirely on the occasion of Hemsterhuis’s thought. What Baader had in mind with the attribution of this syntagma of coagulated spirit to Hemsterhuis is precisely the latter’s insight that an organ can only operate the communicative conjunction of the material and the immaterial if, for a given property of essence, it encompasses both the unextended unitary manifestation of its spiritual occurrence, as well as its corresponding exposition in the multiplicity of material parts, dynamically kept together as orbiting an attractive center. The coagulation at issue in the syntagma seems indeed to refer to the aforementioned “first

³³ Baader, *Werke*, 3.258.

³⁴ Baader, *Werke*, 3.216.

³⁵ Baader, *Werke*, 3.262.

coagulations” which form the seeds or the principle of regularity around which the temporalized revolutions of the material center themselves. And what doubt, finally, could remain in this respect when one considers the closing part of Baader’s passage cited above: namely, that the process of *(dis)solution* which, as the negative of this coagulation, is the route the soul must take in translating its velleity or conatus into a physical action, amounts to breaking the resistance of all individual forces and constitutes for the otherwise eternal soul the suffering of time?

At issue for Hemsterhuis with a “coagulation of spirit” would thus never have been a total effacement of the difference between body and spirit or even of a transformation as such of the one into the other. At stake would much rather have been the attempt at recasting these otherwise absolutely disparate substances in such a way that their common boundary could plausibly sustain rule-bound and truth-preserving interaction. Propulsion by impact is a purely material phenomenon; it gets lost the instant one would purport to appeal to it in order to explain the interaction between matter and what is no longer matter... Acceleration by will is a purely spiritual event; it remains impotent the instant one would purport to appeal to it in order to explain the interaction between the soul and that through which it is located in a milieu of openness to alterity. And the universe itself would fall out of joint if these two could not both be kept in the closest proximity to one another precisely by that which sets them apart, in some way allowing for the point of contact to become porous as it makes them ever so minimally similar to one another. This is exactly what, in the terms of his own philosophy, Baader would eventually refer to as the law of assimilation (*Assimilationsgesetz*)—and would do so in direct connection to Hemsterhuis’s consideration of the relation of our own intellectual self to external material things no less.³⁶ Of course, by the time this assimilation resurfaces in Baader’s philosophy, Hemsterhuis’s own insights will have been filtered through and enriched by Herder’s own force-based meditations on organicity,³⁷ and so the organ will

³⁶ See Baader, *Werke*, 3.209; 11.175; 11.293.

³⁷ Over and above the piece “On Love and Egoism,” with which he countered what he saw as an overly enthusiastic surrender to the unification of essences, Herder played a crucial role in dictating the terms in which Hemsterhuis’s organics would influence later German philosophy. Much closer to Leibniz’s *vis viva* metaphysics, Herder was for one thing opposed to any conception of materiality as a merely passive existent devoid of all activity other than one extrinsically transmitted, insisting that matter is not just the foil and refractory surface of force, but is itself force through and through. Nonetheless cognizant of the need to oppose both the theological dependency of Leibnizianism, as well as the overly subjectivistic tendencies of its transcendental reformulation by Kant, Herder underscored that the medium of connection of forces in their rule-bound integration to form material existents must itself be a force in nature rather than either a divinely guaranteed preestablished

not so much be that third element which brings matter and soul into a region of commonality, but organicity will much rather have become—*pace* Kant—into the inherently complex manner of being of all possible instances of existence. Among the many consequences which will follow from this, the fact can be highlighted that the universe will thereby have been decisively delivered from the puerile atomistic sketch of an aggregate of inert chunks of matter interacting by mere mechanical impulsion in a container of invariable space and invariable time, and set instead on its path towards an account according to which it is the energetic commerce of essence as it transits between the complex topography of being which leads to an accommodation of finite existence in emerging parameters of exhaustion through distension and deferment. Dynamic orbits instead of axiomatic bits, *all the way to the ground...* In turn, ontological mediation will have gone from the conviction of a merely extrinsic analogy between the antipodal domains of spirit and matter, to the much more daring view that existence consists in nothing other than the signature of the spiritual unto the material. In the aforementioned “Contributions to Elementary-Physiology,” Baader indeed says:

Every moving thing is to that extent inside and above the moved thing, as the soul (the animating) is inside and above its organ; the former (e.g. gravity) carries, the latter is carried.—But as everywhere, so too here spontaneity and receptivity are not separable; and the spirit, the active one, is here without its body as good a phantasmagoria, and the mere body (matter as pure passivity or inertia) is as good a metaphysical corpse, as is everywhere else the case. *Inasmuch, by the way, as moving is acting, and resting is a being moved and being acted upon, and [inasmuch as] the acting, the inspiring, strives for nothing in the acting but to make that in and by which it acts like itself, to mirror itself in it, to sign itself with it, so it can also only rest by and through the fact that it moves [it]*—Movement of the

harmony or the mind of the cognitive subject. This mediating and connecting force—he submitted in *God: Some Dialogues* (see Herder, *Werke* 15.456; 15.548)—occupies a different hierarchical level to the one of the forces which it connects. In fact—Herder submits, no doubt deeply profiting from Hemsterhuis’s insights—this one ruling force disposes of the multiple ruled forces in order to express itself over time in a milieu beyond its self-containment. In other words, it uses those forces as its instrument or *organon*, thereby also organizing them to form an ordered spatio-temporalized disclosure of its essence. This conviction—grossly misunderstood by Kant but rehabilitated by later thinkers—is what is at the heart of Herder’s intimation, in works such as the *Ideas towards a Philosophy of the History of Human Kind*, that all existence is organic: i.e. inherently constituted as the dynamical expression of a unitary essence unto the common medium in which alone it comes together with others as properly existing.

periphery is one with rest of the center, inhibition of movement in the periphery is one with restlessness of the center.³⁸

But what about the coagulated god? The reasons why Baader would have proceeded to the second part of his attribution—claiming that for Hemsterhuis the corporeal universe is a coagulated god—are admittedly harder to unearth; yet in light of the proposed solution to the first part of the conundrum, let themselves be cleared up. As a first step toward that end, it is important not to lose sight that, over and beyond the fact that the relation at stake in coagulation is *not* one of straightforward identity (but rather of asymmetrical assimilation), Baader additionally never claims Hemsterhuis to have made the divinity itself—God writ large—into the universe as such. What he rather submitted was the somewhat more digestible claim that Hemsterhuis took the corporeal universe to be a coagulated god. It is undeniable that for Baader this would have first and foremost referred to Hemsterhuis’s characterization of God as the ultimate unity which relates to the universe as a whole qua multiple and extended, in fact being the very cause of its “forced” multiplicity and of all the arrangements and motions through which that multiplicity acquires the particular configurations that it does (see *EE* 1.85).³⁹ In this respect, both the *Letter on Desires* and the *Letter on Man* offer important instruction. Beyond that, further valuable clues are, unsurprisingly, found in the dialogue *Aristaeus, or on Divinity*.⁴⁰ For one thing, this dialogue supports previous characterizations of God as the source of “primitive action” (*EE* 2.83) overcoming the inherent inertia of an otherwise static and sterile material universe in the direction of its “forced state” of mereological dynamic complexity. For another thing, the *Aristaeus* also explicitly thematizes the issue of the precise medium of relation which would connect God to the material universe, and so importantly draws the notion of coagulation closer to divinity, albeit at the price of a reduction of scope.

³⁸ Baader, *Werke*, 3.251; my emphasis.

³⁹ Hemsterhuis’s rejection of the conception of divinity as a world-soul may appear to speak against Baader’s parallel between coagulated spirit and a coagulated god. It nonetheless seems to me that the arguments against such a parallel dissipate as soon as one considers that Hemsterhuis’s rejection of the world-soul conception obeys his view that God is not to be reduced to a mere aggregation or regulative principle of all the motions of the material universe, and that this view is presented precisely on the basis of the argument that the immaterial part of the human being likewise is not simply a mere sum of physiological or involuntary motions of the body, but something which transcends that level and relates to it freely by means of a will. See footnote 9 above.

⁴⁰ Evidence of the importance of this work for Baader’s philosophical development, particularly in what concerns God’s relation to the universe and the role the former plays as the cause of the universe’s “forced state” as composite and resisting ultimate unification, is provided by his diary. See Baader, *Werke*, 11.171–173; 11.327.

Indeed, Hemsterhuis makes clear that, in the eyes of divinity, the composition of the universe is not simply to be thought as the mere material sum-total of atoms—somewhat like a “block of marble”—but much rather as composed by parts “in terms of their entire essences,” (*EE* 2. 70) i.e., considering also the myriad relations of its constituent essences beyond their analogy to sense organs only. That does not mean to say, however, that the material universe would not itself already bear a relation to God in terms of its composition. Only this relation would not so much pertain to God as such, but rather only to one of its infinite attributes—and indeed to “the only attribute by which we know of this great Being by means of our [sensible] organs” (*EE* 2.93), namely: space. In this sense, Hemsterhuis makes clear that, as only one attribute, space stands an infinity of attributes away from exhausting the plenitude and power of God. But he does say of it that—like God—it is infinite, one, and that it has no parts and is absolute in nature, “encompass[ing] within itself everything” (*EE* 2.93). And moreover, taking up the same line of argument as he had in the *Sophylus* with regard to the nerve—and undoubtedly drawing inspiration once again from Newton⁴¹—he submits that all of what is material or corporeal has relation to God through space “in proportion to the richness of their composition and of their homogeneity with him” (*EE* 2.95). Although space is not an organ, it is nonetheless very plausible that, in Baader’s creative appropriation of Hemsterhuis’s speculations, its role in relating divinity to nature and giving rise to “eternal duration” would have found expression in the view that, just as matter is coagulated spirit to the extent that it arranges itself in a given composition corresponding to a given property of the soul, so too the corporeal universe would be a coagulated god to the extent that it is arranged in a given composition corresponding to an attribute of God.

I leave to the reader the task of deciding whether God is capable of the imperfect look through which alone the universe could appear as beautiful.

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⁴¹ I am thinking of course of Newton’s (in)famous thesis—found in Query 31 to the *Opticks*—that space constitutes a *sensorium Dei*, or the medium (distinguished explicitly from organ) through which God would perceive and act on bodies. See Isaac Newton, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Andrew Janiak, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 138.

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«Come le comete intorno al sole»

Il confronto tra gli antichi e i moderni in Hemsterhuis e la sua ricezione

*Viviana Galletta**

ABSTRACT

During the eighteenth century, the quarrel of the ancients and the moderns was a sharp contrast between those people who celebrated antiquity as a universal model and those who considered modernity as a period of progress in the sciences and arts. Through an analysis of a number of salient passages in François Hemsterhuis's philosophical works, this article pursues a new third approach: it proposes a historical and dialectical reading that relativizes the two poles of the dispute. Moreover, a contextual examination of specific elements of the Romantic response to this well-known quarrel reveal their affinity with the Hemsterhuisian 'solution'. Indeed, the latter is, in certain cases, their direct source of inspiration.

Keywords: Ancients, Moderns, Aesthetics, Philosophy of History, Romanticism

ABSTRACT

Nel corso del XVIII secolo la *querelle* tra gli antichi e i moderni si presentava come un dibattito polarizzato intorno a due posizioni principali: da un lato si celebrava l'esemplarità universale degli antichi, dall'altro, invece, veniva enfatizzata la perfezione conseguita dai moderni nel campo delle scienze e delle arti. Quanto si intende esaminare in questo studio, attraverso l'analisi di alcuni passaggi salienti dell'opera filosofica di Franciscus Hemsterhuis, è il delinearsi di un terzo ulteriore approccio. Tale nuova prospettiva rappresenta, di fatto, il superamento della *querelle* nella sua impostazione più tradizionale, poiché propone una lettura storica e dialettica che relativizza i due poli della disputa. Contestualmente, l'esame di alcuni testi rappresentativi della risposta romantica al celebre dibattito consentirà di metterne in luce taluni elementi di affinità con la "soluzione" hemsterhuisiana, che ne è, in alcuni casi, la fonte diretta di ispirazione.

Parole chiave: Antichi, Moderni, Estetica, Filosofia della storia, Romanticismo

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1. Introduzione

Quanto si intende esaminare nelle prossime pagine, attraverso l'analisi di alcuni passaggi salienti dell'opera filosofica di Franciscus Hemsterhuis, è il delinearci di un approccio per certi aspetti innovativo nei riguardi dell'annosa questione circa il rapporto tra gli antichi e i moderni. Il fatto che tale *querelle* rappresenti uno snodo significativo nella storia della cultura europea dell'età moderna è ormai ampiamente riconosciuto dalla vastissima letteratura sull'argomento. A partire dai due grandi studi classici di Hippolyte Rigault e di Hubert Gillot dedicati alla ricostruzione della *querelle* in una prospettiva di lunga durata, sono numerose le pubblicazioni che attestano l'importanza di tale dibattito per la genesi e per l'elaborazione di alcune categorie estetiche, etico-politiche e culturali precie della civiltà moderna.¹

Nella sua declinazione secentesca e settecentesca, la *querelle* si presenta sostanzialmente come un dibattito letterario polarizzato intorno a due principali partiti. Il partito dei moderni, capeggiato da Charles Perrault, celebrava il secolo di Luigi XIV come l'emblema della perfezione e il culmine del progresso nel campo delle scienze e delle arti, mentre quello degli antichi, guidato da Nicolas Boileau, si raffigurava il monarca francese come un eroe antico riapparso tra i moderni per rigenerarne il gusto e per dar loro una nuova grandezza, alla luce dell'insuperabile esempio di perfezione offerto dai modelli greci e romani. Per questi ultimi era fondamentale, sul piano della creazione artistica, il ricorso all'*imitatio* dei modelli classici, al fine di risanare la decadenza della modernità. Di converso, per i moderni acquistava centralità il principio dell'*inventio*, vale a dire l'originalità e la novità culturale di cui essi erano convinti promotori.²

La prospettiva teorica elaborata da Hemsterhuis conduce, di fatto, al superamento della *querelle* nella sua impostazione più tradizionale – vale a

¹ Per una ricostruzione della storia della *querelle* in una prospettiva di lunga durata si rimanda ai due grandi studi classici citati: H. Rigault, *Histoire de la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Paris, Hachette, 1856; H. Gillot, *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes en France*, Paris, Champion, 1914. Per quanto riguarda, invece, alcune delle pubblicazioni più recenti, rinvio a M. Fumaroli, *Le api e i ragni. La disputa degli Antichi e dei Moderni* (2001), a cura di G. Cillario e M. Scotti, Milano, Adelphi, 2005; P. Bullard – A. Tadié (eds.), *Ancients and Moderns in Europe: Comparative Perspectives*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 2016; J. Bos – J. Rotmans (eds.), *The Long Quarrel. Past and Present in the Eighteenth Century*, Leiden–Boston, Brill, 2021.

² Tra le pubblicazioni più recenti sulla nozione di *imitatio* o *mimesis* rimando a F. Di Santo, *Genealogia della mimesis. Fra mimesis antica e imitatio rinascimentale*, Pisa, ETS, 2016; N. Lawtoo, *Modernismo e teoria mimetica*, in N. Lawtoo, *Il fantasma dell'io. La massa e l'inconscio mimetico*, Milano, Mimesis, 2018, p. 329-340; E. Tavani, *Mimesi*, in G. Ferrario (ed.), *Estetica dell'arte contemporanea*, Milano, Meltemi, 2019, p. 105-128; U. Fracassa (ed.), *Moti di imitazione. Teorie della mimesi e letteratura*, Milano, Morellini, 2020.

dire come un contrasto insanabile tra chi celebrava l'esemplarità atemporale degli antichi e chi, invece, esaltava la perfezione conseguita dai moderni –, in virtù della formulazione di un'interpretazione storica. Il filosofo nederlandese articola una sostanziale relativizzazione dei due poli della disputa, in base alla quale né l'antico né il moderno sono assunti come criteri di perfezione universale o come il culmine del progresso. Antichi e moderni vengono invece considerati al pari di due differenti esperienze storico-culturali egualmente significative. Siffatta impostazione si costruisce principalmente nel terreno delle riflessioni sull'arte all'interno della *Lettera sulla scultura* (1769), laddove il filosofo nederlandese pone in discussione il principio classicista di "imitazione", assumendo una prospettiva storica sull'arte, capace di valorizzare l'antico senza farne un modello di riferimento universale. Il ruolo della storia nella formulazione di una risoluzione della disputa tra gli antichi e i moderni viene approfondito ulteriormente nella *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti* (1772) e nel dialogo *Alessio o l'età dell'oro* (1787), laddove la metafora scientifica della traiettoria eccentrica percorsa dalle comete intorno al sole e la ripresa del mito dell'età dell'oro rappresentano, in modo figurativo, il riconoscimento della "perfettibilità" della scienza umana in ogni punto della sua vicenda storica. Entro tale filosofia della storia, che presenta gli antichi e i moderni come due "pericoli" iscritti nella traiettoria eccentrica tracciata dallo spirito umano intorno alla perfezione, il ritorno all'antico è inteso in un'ottica non tanto nostalgica quanto aperta e progressiva, perché volta al futuro e al miglioramento continuo ed infinito dell'umanità.

Nei prossimi paragrafi si cercherà di mettere a fuoco, innanzitutto, la "soluzione" hemsterhuisiana alla *querelle*, seguendo un itinerario argomentativo che prenderà in esame l'estetica e la filosofia della storia. Contestualmente, l'analisi di alcune tesi elaborate dal primo Romanticismo tedesco a proposito dei rapporti tra gli antichi e i moderni avrà lo scopo di far emergere talune affinità di impostazione con la riflessione hemsterhuisiana, la quale talvolta risulta essere una fonte diretta di ispirazione.³ La ricezione dei testi hemsterhuisiani nel contesto tedesco

³ Madame de Staël, nella celebre opera *De l'Allemagne*, presenta Hemsterhuis come il padre spirituale delle nuove idee del Romanticismo tedesco: «Hemsterhuis, filosofo olandese, fu il primo, in pieno Settecento, a suggerire nei suoi scritti la maggior parte delle idee generose, fondamento della nuova scuola tedesca», Madame de Staël-Holstein, *La Germania* (1813), a cura di A. Caporali, Torino, De Silva, 1943, p. 462-463. Per quanto concerne il rapporto tra Hemsterhuis e il Romanticismo, rimando a A. P. Dierick, *Pre-Romantic Elements in the Aesthetic and Moral Theories of François Hemsterhuis (1721-1790)*, «Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture», 26, 1997, p. 247-271; G. Frigo, *Il più segreto sentiero verso l'interiorità. La lettura 'romantica' di Hemsterhuis*, in L. Illetterati – A. Moretto (ed.), *Frans Hemsterhuis e la*

costituisce un momento decisivo per la “fortuna” dell’autore nederlandese in età moderna. Tuttavia, siffatta ricezione, con particolare riguardo al tema del rapporto tra gli antichi e i moderni, non deve essere intesa come un’acquisizione passiva di concetti e di idee, e ciò al fine di valorizzare l’originalità delle elaborazioni teoriche proprie dei romantici e di evitare, al contempo, un’interpretazione “retrospettiva” che consideri Hemsterhuis come un mero anticipatore della stagione romantica.⁴

Nel contesto culturale tedesco a cavallo tra Settecento e Ottocento si diffondono nuove teorie e poetiche letterarie che, sulla scorta del confronto tra l’arte degli antichi e l’arte dei moderni, e attraverso la valorizzazione dell’approccio storico, giungono al riconoscimento dell’autonomia dell’arte moderna, abbandonando, così, il criterio classicista dell’imitazione. Per citare un esempio, i primi passi del pensiero di Friedrich Schlegel si muovono proprio all’interno della traiettoria inaugurata dalla celebre *querelle* settecentesca. Al riguardo, una preziosa testimonianza è costituita dal saggio *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* del 1797, laddove la nozione di “studio” consente di conciliare l’opposizione tra *imitatio* e *inventio*. Anche in questo caso, è la messa in discussione del criterio classicista di “imitazione” a segnalare la novità di prospettiva in rapporto alla classicità ed ai suoi modelli. Tale criterio sottende, infatti, una concezione idealizzante e normativa dell’antichità, alla quale Friedrich Schlegel contrappone lo “studio”, vale a dire una pratica ermeneutica incentrata su un confronto critico e dialettico, e non semplicemente mimetico e celebrativo, con il passato ed i suoi modelli.⁵

Al di là dell’affinità di impostazione, talvolta la costruzione della risposta romantica alla *querelle* si delinea proprio a partire da quanto indicato nei testi hemsterhuisiani. È questo il caso delle categorie di «plastica» e di «pittresco», introdotte da August Wilhelm Schlegel sulla scia della distinzione hemsterhuisiana tra la scultura e la pittura. L’elemento comune

cultura filosofica europea tra Settecento e Ottocento, Trento, Verifiche, 2004, p. 207-224; C. Melica, *Alle origini dell’estetica romantica. La fortuna delle idee di Hemsterhuis nella Germania di fine Settecento*, «Intersezioni», XXV, 2005, p. 5-32.

⁴ Per quanto concerne il problema di un’impostazione storiografica “retrospettiva”, propria degli studi hemsterhuisiani della prima metà del Novecento e oramai ampiamente superata, si veda E. Matassi, *Hemsterhuis. Istanza critica e filosofia della storia*, Napoli, Guida, 1983.

⁵ Per un approfondimento della categoria romantica di «studio» rimando a S. Fornaro, *Lo «studio degli antichi». 1793-1807*, «Quaderni di storia», XXII, 43, 1996, p. 111-155; S. Fornaro, *Christian Gottlob Heyne. Le nuove vie dello studio degli antichi*, in D. Lanza – G. Ugolini (ed.), *Storia della filologia classica*, Roma, Carocci, 2016, p. 49-70; A. Costazza, «Studio» invece di «imitazione». *L’antichità classica come costruzione per i Classicisti e i Romantici tedeschi*, in A. Costazza (ed.), *Il romantico nel Classicismo, il classico nel Romanticismo*, Milano, LED, 2017, p. 87-104.

ai due autori è principalmente la consapevolezza della relatività storica dell'antichità classica e, al contempo, il riconoscimento delle specificità che connotano la civiltà moderna, anch'essa a sua volta relativizzata sul piano storico e culturale.

La modernità liberata da ogni pregiudizio classicista, e quindi dall'idea di esemplarità e di superiorità dei modelli antichi, viene riconosciuta e legittimata nella sua autonomia dal passato. L'antichità, a sua volta, non viene totalmente rigettata, come fosse uno stadio della civiltà ormai superato, ma continua a mantenere una funzione dialettica fondamentale per la costruzione progressiva del moderno.⁶

2. «Une route bien différente»: scultura e pittura, plastica e pittoresco

La riflessione filosofica hemsterhuisiana presenta al suo interno un'oscillazione mai definitivamente risolta tra normatività e storicità in rapporto al problema dell'antico. Da un lato, il passato viene assunto nei termini di un modello di riferimento sul piano estetico ed etico-sociale, in base al quale avanzare una precisa critica a certe derive della modernità. Siffatta prospettiva si inserisce entro una consolidata tradizione che, nel corso dell'età moderna, promuoveva una lettura per così dire non oggettiva ma mitico-celebrativa dell'antichità, raffigurandola come una realtà edenica alla quale rivolgersi per intervenire sulle criticità del tempo presente.⁷ Da un secondo punto di vista, il passato viene invece indagato all'interno di una prospettiva di ricerca più oggettiva e scientifica, attraverso la valorizzazione della storia e di altri strumenti ermeneutici atti a coglierne la specificità e la distanza, in termini di «spirito» dell'epoca, dal moderno. Nel contesto della trattazione sul bello, e nello specifico nella *Lettera sulla scultura*,⁸ tale oscillazione si risolve in favore della storicizzazione del fenomeno artistico, con l'abbandono del criterio mimetico e della tesi, di ascendenza

⁶ Per un approfondimento circa la funzione dell'antico e dei suoi modelli in seno alla modernità, rimando a G. Pucci, *Il passato prossimo. La scienza dell'antichità alle origini della cultura moderna*, Roma, Carocci, 1993; D. Galligani – C. Leroy – A. Magnan – B. Saint Girons (ed.), *Rivoluzioni dell'antico*, Bologna, Bologna University Press, 2006; C. Nicosia – G. Tortorelli (ed.), *L'antico nel moderno. Il recupero del classico nelle forme del pensiero moderno*, Perugia, Pengragon, 2013.

⁷ Per inquadrare la questione dal punto di vista dei romantici, con specifico riguardo alla funzione del mito, si rimanda a M. Frank, *Il Dio a venire. Lezioni sulla nuova mitologia* (1982), a cura di F. Cuniberto, Torino, Einaudi, 1994. Sul tema della palingenesi o della rigenerazione nel contesto romantico, si veda M. Cometa, *Il romanzo dell'infinito, Mitologie, metafore e simboli nell'età di Goethe*, Palermo, Aesthetica, 1990.

⁸ Cfr. F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, a cura di C. Melica, Napoli, Vivarium, 2001, p. 459-491.

winckelmanniana, che riconosce il carattere normativo ed esemplare dell'arte greca.⁹ La centralità assunta dal soggetto e dai suoi desideri colloca la riflessione hemsterhuisiana intorno alla scultura in una posizione ormai distante da una definizione unitaria e normativa del bello, precipua dell'impostazione settecentesca. In virtù dell'accentuazione dell'aspetto empirico e psicologico dell'esperienza estetica, che non risulta ora riducibile ai criteri di bellezza propri delle poetiche classiciste, Hemsterhuis giunge alla conclusione secondo la quale il bello non configura una realtà di per sé sussistente (e presente nella natura o nei canoni classici), ma una costruzione operata dal soggetto. Al riguardo, egli afferma: «C'è ancora un'osservazione da fare, che è assai umiliante, per la verità, ma che prova incontestabilmente che il bello non ha alcuna realtà in sé».¹⁰ Nella prospettiva hemsterhuisiana, il bello viene definito come l'esito del rapporto tra un'istanza sintetica (*minimum*) e una quantità molteplice sulla quale tale sintesi si esercita (*maximum*). Da tale rapporto non si ricava una mera conoscenza della realtà fisica ma l'*optimum* che l'anima, per sua natura, desidera sempre:¹¹ «il bello, in tutte le arti, ci deve fornire il maggior numero possibile di idee nel minor tempo possibile».¹² Il fulcro dell'esperienza estetica si sposta, così, dall'oggetto bello a ciò che «l'anima giudica più bello», ponendo in risalto il ruolo decisivo del soggetto e dei suoi desideri. In tal modo, l'arte si differenzia nettamente dalle produzioni della natura:

Mi sembra facile capire [...] che sia del tutto possibile, per ciò che riguarda il bello, superare la natura; poiché questo sarebbe un caso davvero eccezionale, che consisterebbe nel mettere un certo numero di parti talmente in accordo da risultarne quell'*optimum* che desidero e che è analogo non all'essenza delle cose, ma all'effetto del rapporto che esiste tra le cose e la costituzione dei miei organi.¹³

Sulla scorta di tale definizione, evidentemente distante da un'estetica incentrata sul criterio di imitazione, che di fatto iscrive la produzione artistica entro un rapporto di subordinazione rispetto ad una qualche normatività rappresentata dalla nozione di natura o dai modelli classici, Hemsterhuis sviluppa una riflessione assai articolata circa le diverse modalità

⁹ Cfr. A. M. D'Onofrio, *Alla ricerca dell'arte greca: Winckelmann e la continuità dell'antico*, in I. Bragantini – E. Morlicchio (ed.), *Winckelmann e l'archeologia a Napoli*, Napoli, Atti dell'incontro di studi – Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale, 2019, p. 61-91.

¹⁰ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, p. 476.

¹¹ Cfr. D. Falcioni, *Il bello è eusynopton? Sulla recente edizione italiana della lettera sulla scultura di Frans Hemsterhuis*, «Paradigmi», 15, 1997, p. 169-182.

¹² F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, p. 472.

¹³ *Ivi*, p. 475.

di rappresentazione del bello artistico, ponendo le basi concettuali per il riconoscimento dell'autonomia dell'arte moderna sotto il profilo dei principi che ne regolano la produzione.

L'analisi hemsterhuisiana sulla scultura e sulle arti in generale individua due vie differenti per produrre artisticamente il bello: diminuire il *minimum*, così da consentire al soggetto fruitore una più rapida percezione della totalità espressa dall'oggetto d'arte (attraverso la semplicità del contorno) oppure aumentare il *maximum*, e cioè fornire al soggetto fruitore un maggior numero di idee (attraverso la rappresentazione di azioni e di passioni). Nel primo caso, e cioè nel caso in cui l'artista operi per diminuire il *minimum* di tempo, ad esserne avvantaggiata è l'unitarietà dell'opera d'arte, mentre nel secondo caso ad avere maggiore spazio è la molteplicità delle parti rappresentate (in termini di azioni e di passioni). Vediamo ora in che termini la scelta di una via rispetto all'altra, e cioè la scelta dell'unitarietà o dell'espressività, determina i confini tra le arti (la scultura e la pittura) e in che misura il confronto tra gli antichi e i moderni viene implicato nell'individuazione di tali differenze.

Appurata la maggiore antichità della scultura, sulla base della costruzione di una gerarchia tra i sensi che riconosce l'anteriorità nello sviluppo del tatto rispetto a quello della vista, Hemsterhuis procede con la trattazione dello sviluppo storico di tale forma d'arte, ponendo di fatto al centro dell'analisi il rapporto tra i Greci e le altre culture e, in ultimo, tra i Greci e i moderni. Nella delineazione di tale abbozzo di storia dell'arte, l'antichità non viene assunta come una categoria omogenea ma, più realisticamente, come una concatenazione di popoli diversi nella storia, ciascuno contrassegnato da uno "spirito" che si irradia su tutte le sue espressioni culturali, compresa l'arte. Nonostante l'approccio storico, l'*excursus* giunge ad individuare l'eccellenza e la perfezione della scultura presso i Greci, a tal punto che «si possa considerarli come se le arti fossero nate davvero presso di loro».¹⁴ L'eccellenza greca diventa, in ultimo, il termine principale del confronto, sul piano della produzione artistica, tra gli antichi (i Greci, per l'appunto) e i moderni. In altri termini, pur riconoscendo nella scultura un'espressione dello «spirito» dei diversi popoli sul piano della storia, e per ciò stesso sottratta ad ogni canone universale e normativo valido per tutti ed in qualunque tempo, Hemsterhuis abbraccia la tesi dell'unicità e della perfezione dei Greci nel campo di tale arte e dell'arte in generale, ribadendo una contraddizione già presente in Winckelmann. Accanto all'affermazione dell'eccellenza della scultura presso gli antichi (dei Greci),

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 479.

la consapevolezza del carattere storico del fenomeno artistico conduce l'autore nederlandese ad un approfondimento più problematico circa il rapporto tra gli antichi e i moderni sul piano della produzione artistica. Ne ripercorriamo i passaggi fondamentali attraverso i seguenti momenti argomentativi: a) appurata la perfezione della scultura presso i Greci, l'autore passa a considerare questa forma d'arte sotto un profilo più generale, individuando i principi fondamentali che ne regolano la produzione e che la differenziano dalla pittura; b) se la scultura ha raggiunto la propria eccellenza presso i Greci, poiché presso di loro la dimensione morale e, di conseguenza, il desiderio di unità si esprimono con la massima perfezione, man mano che ci si sposta verso la modernità le produzioni artistiche si sbilanciano in direzione del *maximum*, e cioè verso una maggiore espressione delle azioni e delle passioni. Tale *maximum*, per costituirsi in quanto *optimum*, e quindi come qualcosa di armonico e di unitario, nonostante la molteplicità rappresentata, deve esprimersi in una nuova forma d'arte, riconducibile ai principi che regolano la pittura. Si viene a stabilire, dunque, la seguente relazione: "scultura : antichi = pittura : moderni". Tale relazione può essere altrimenti letta in tal senso: "scultura = prima via di produzione artistica (diminuzione del *minimum*); pittura = seconda via di produzione artistica (aumento del *maximum*)."

a) Individuata l'eccellenza dell'arte presso i Greci, il discorso hemsterhuisiano si sposta a considerare in modo più approfondito la scultura e la sua differenza specifica rispetto alle altre arti. Questo brusco passaggio dall'*excursus* storico alla trattazione dell'arte sotto un profilo più generale e normativo riveste, come si tenterà di dimostrare, una funzione decisiva per delineare i rapporti tra le produzioni artistiche degli antichi (i Greci) e quelle dei moderni. Tracciare la differenza tra le arti significa, innanzi tutto, distinguerne i confini ed individuare le caratteristiche specifiche di ciascuna. Il "principio necessario" che regola la produzione della scultura viene qui individuato nell'unità o semplicità, a cui viene associata la "qualità facile" del contorno. Tali principi, l'unità della rappresentazione e la fluidità del contorno, vengono ricavati sulla base del costo e della durezza della materia impiegata nella produzione di un'opera scultorea, fattori che, di necessità, limitano tale produzione – che tra l'altro rappresenta l'oggetto in tutta la sua solidità ed interezza – alla rappresentazione di una figura semplice o, al massimo, di una composizione di poche figure. Dunque, perché le produzioni scultoree siano apprezzate anche a gran distanza, è necessario che lo scultore operi sulla semplicità dei contorni per diminuire il *minimum*, in luogo della rappresentazione di azioni e di passioni, che invece rischierebbe

di inficiare il senso di unità dell'intera opera. Per queste ragioni, all'espressione di azioni e di passioni, la scultura antepone la "quiete" e la "maestosità" della figura rappresentata. È evidente che, nel discorso relativo alla produzione della scultura, Hemsterhuis riprende la prima delle due vie ammesse nell'ambito della produzione del bello artistico, e cioè quella che lavora sulla diminuzione del *minimum*, fermo restando che comunque il bello prodotto debba fornire il massimo numero di idee possibili.

Individuati i principi propri della scultura, Hemsterhuis procede a considerarla in rapporto alla pittura.¹⁵ L'elemento discriminante tra le due arti è ricondotto, significativamente, al problema dell'espressione delle azioni e delle passioni. Difatti, mentre la scultura deve limitarsi alla quiete e all'unitarietà dell'azione rappresentata, avvantaggiando il *minimum*, la pittura può invece accogliere una molteplicità di azioni e di passioni (*maximum*) senza che ne venga inficiato il senso generale di totalità e di armonia. Le composizioni della pittura sono, infatti, più estese rispetto a quelle della scultura e consentono, proprio per tale ragione, di compensare l'eventuale rappresentazione del "disgustoso". In questo passaggio, con la nozione di "disgustoso" Hemsterhuis intende indicare l'eccesso delle azioni e delle passioni rappresentate, eccesso che nasconde il rischio di inficiare l'unità dell'opera d'arte, con la conseguenza di far emergere la "contraddizione" nella totalità dell'opera.¹⁶ Tuttavia, i principi che regolano la produzione della pittura consentono all'artista di compensare il *maximum* rappresentato per via del maggiore spazio di rappresentazione a sua disposizione:

La pittura può servirsi qualche volta del disgustoso per aumentare l'orrore, poiché le sue composizioni essendo assai estese possono mitigarlo in qualche altra parte.¹⁷

La realizzazione di un'opera pittorica è riconducibile, dunque, alla seconda via di produzione artistica del bello, e cioè a quella che opera per aumentare il *maximum* attraverso la rappresentazione di azioni e di passioni, purché esso sia armonizzato nell'unità-totalità complessiva dell'opera.

¹⁵ Per quanto concerne i nessi tra questo passaggio e il procedimento attuato da Lessing nel suo *Laocoonte* rinvio a M. Cometa, *Postfazione*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, a cura di E. Matassi, Palermo, Aesthetica, 1994, p. 78-79.

¹⁶ Per quanto riguarda la nozione di contraddizione in ordine alla distruzione del bello: «Quello che distrugge maggiormente quest'*optimum* nelle produzioni artistiche è la contraddizione che si trova in una totalità, sia tra le parti del contorno, sia tra quelle che esprimono azioni e passioni», F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, p. 473.

¹⁷ *Ivi*, p. 488.

b) Per tentare di ricavare una riflessione conclusiva circa il rapporto tra gli antichi e i moderni nel campo delle produzioni artistiche, prendiamo in esame i seguenti passaggi:

Vedremo ben presto che le nazioni che cominciano imitando le altre arrivano alla loro perfezione per una via molto diversa da quella percorsa dai Greci.¹⁸

Non bisogna cercare, a mio parere, la superiorità dei Greci nell'espressione delle azioni e delle passioni, poiché i moderni non sono in ciò per niente inferiori ai loro maestri, ma piuttosto in quella qualità delicata e semplice del contorno.¹⁹

che l'artista sia pittore quanto voglia nell'esprimere l'azione, ma sia scultore per arricchire ugualmente il più possibile tutti i profili. [...] non si possono accusare molto i Greci di questo difetto, ma si può dire che i nostri scultori moderni sono troppo pittori, così come, evidentemente, i pittori greci erano troppo scultori.²⁰

La prima considerazione introduce la tesi di una via differente («*une route bien différente*»), rispetto a quella seguita dagli artisti greci, per produrre il bello. Ora, mi pare lecito ipotizzare che qui si faccia riferimento proprio alla via seguita dai moderni, e cioè ad una modalità di rappresentazione artistica assai diversa da quella degli antichi, sebbene parimenti valida ai fini della realizzazione del bello e del conseguimento di una qualche forma di perfezione, chiaramente relativa («*à leur perfection*»), nel campo dell'estetica.

Tale ipotesi trova ulteriore conferma se si considera la citazione successiva, dal momento che essa scardina in una qualche misura l'idea di una superiorità assoluta dei Greci rispetto ai moderni, introducendo, per entrambi, la possibilità di conseguire una forma di perfezione nelle arti, sebbene sulla base di principi differenti. Nel caso dei Greci è la via del *minimum* a condurli alla rappresentazione del bello, mentre per i moderni è quella del *maximum*, e cioè una forma di rappresentazione artistica centrata sull'«espressione delle azioni e delle passioni». Tali considerazioni ribaltano l'idea, di ascendenza winckelmanniana, dell'unicità dei Greci e quella, ad essa conseguente, del principio di imitazione come unica via per conseguire il bello e per raggiungere la perfezione sul piano delle produzioni artistiche. Difatti, non è l'imitazione degli antichi a determinare, nel campo delle arti, l'eccellenza dei moderni ma, al contrario, una differente modalità di

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 479.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, p. 485.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 489.

rappresentazione, affine alla peculiarità del loro “spirito”: «Se Lei me ne chiede la ragione, credo che la si potrebbe individuare in gran parte nello spirito geometrico del nostro secolo». ²¹

Per rimarcare ulteriormente queste differenze («*Pour finir le parallèle des artistes grecs et modernes*»), Hemsterhuis introduce un’interessante considerazione: il diavolo, in quanto rappresentazione del “ripugnante” e del “ridicolo”, costituisce il solo soggetto appartenente alla modernità. La sua rappresentazione richiede, infatti, l’applicazione di principi ben diversi dalla semplicità del contorno e dalla quiete della figura e tali da rendere, attraverso l’espressione delle azioni, tutta la sua mostruosità. I Greci, seguendo una via di rappresentazione e di produzione artistica fondata sui principi di unità, quiete e semplicità del contorno, non avrebbero potuto rappresentarlo o, se l’avessero fatto, lo avrebbero privato dei suoi caratteri essenziali, attribuendogli una “figura costante”, e quindi connotandolo secondo caratteri che certamente non sono rappresentativi di una figura tanto irregolare come quella del diavolo. Seguendo questo ragionamento, a rigor di logica, il *Laocoonte*, ritenuto l’opera plastica per antonomasia, dovrebbe figurare come la massima espressione dell’arte degli antichi. La posizione hemsterhuisiana è, tuttavia, ben differente: «oso aggiungere che i due capolavori rodesi, il *Laocoonte* e l’*Anfione*, appartengono molto più alla pittura che alla scultura». ²² Tale considerazione appare tutt’altro che provocatoria se si prende in esame la nota di commento introdotta dallo stesso Hemsterhuis. In essa l’autore specifica che, benché il *Laocoonte* appartenga indiscutibilmente alla scultura, il fatto che la sua collocazione originaria lo ponesse a grande distanza dal soggetto fruitore, offrendo in tal modo “un solo punto di vista”, lo avvicinerrebbe alla pittura e ai suoi principi di rappresentazione. Ad essere implicata è, in questo caso, la differenza tra due differenti modalità di rappresentazione, ricondotte rispettivamente alla scultura e alla pittura: a tutto tondo nel primo caso, su una superficie piana nel secondo.

Il punto nodale della questione è ricondotto, in ultimo, alle differenze che intercorrono tra gli antichi (i Greci) e i moderni. Difatti, la riflessione sul *Laocoonte* è inserita all’interno di un ragionamento più ampio che coinvolge, per l’appunto, due differenti modalità di rappresentazione del bello artistico – «che l’artista sia pittore quanto voglia nell’esprimere l’azione, ma che sia scultore per arricchire ugualmente il più possibile tutti i profili» ²³ –, riconducibili rispettivamente ai Greci («*trop sculpteurs*») e ai moderni («*trop*

²¹ *Ivi*, p. 485.

²² *Ivi*, p. 489.

²³ *Ibidem*.

peintres»). Ad essere in gioco sono, quindi, non soltanto le due vie di rappresentazione del bello ma anche il rapporto, letto alla luce del differente «spirito» che li contraddistingue, tra gli antichi e i moderni. In altri termini, appurato che il bello, per essere definito tale, debba corrispondere ai desideri del soggetto e rappresentare un mezzo, il più infimo tra l'altro, per approssimarsi all'unità metafisica ricercata, le vie perché esso si realizzi possono essere diverse, purché forniscano all'anima il massimo numero di idee (*maximum*) nel minor tempo possibile (*minimum*). La distinzione tra la scultura e la pittura, sebbene venga elaborata nel quadro di un «*parallèle*» tra le produzioni artistiche degli antichi e quelle dei moderni, assume talvolta i caratteri di una distinzione più tipologica che storica, determinando un ulteriore e fecondo confronto, non riconducibile univocamente al contrasto tra antichità e modernità. Difatti, il *Laocoonte*, benché appartenente alle produzioni degli antichi, viene ricondotto ai principi della pittura (la via del *maximum*), mentre l'*Ercole ed Anteo* di Michelangelo, che appartiene, invece, alle produzioni artistiche della modernità, viene qualificato come una rappresentazione riconducibile ai principi propri della scultura (la via del *minimum*).

Il ragionamento hemsterhuisiano sviluppato nella seconda parte della *Lettera sulla scultura* si ferma su questo punto, senza specificare né approfondire ulteriormente la questione in oggetto. Per questa ragione, alcuni passaggi rimangono in certa misura ambigui, risultando maggiormente comprensibili soltanto se riletti alla luce delle opere successive, laddove il problema dello «spirito» degli antichi e dei moderni viene ripreso e ampliato nel contesto di una originale filosofia della storia.

La distinzione tra scultura e pittura dal punto di vista dei principi che ne regolano la produzione diviene, invece, una compiuta teoria nel contesto romantico.²⁴ Nelle *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst* tenute all'Università di Berlino nel 1801, August Wilhelm Schlegel formula, proprio sulla base del confronto tra l'arte degli antichi e l'arte dei moderni, la nota distinzione tra «plastica» e «pittorresco».²⁵ Seguendo esplicitamente l'indicazione hemsterhuisiana esposta nelle ultime pagine della *Lettera sulla scultura*, egli, così, afferma:

²⁴ Per un approfondimento maggiore in merito alla funzione svolta dalla dialettica tra antico e moderno nella costruzione della teoria del romantico, si rimanda a P. Szondi, *Antico e moderno nell'estetica dell'età di Goethe* (1974), a cura di P. Kobau, Napoli-Milano, Guerini e Associati, 1995.

²⁵ Cfr. M. Cometa, *Postfazione*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, a cura di E. Matassi, cit, p. 78-80.

Non dobbiamo perciò meravigliarci dello svantaggio che i moderni hanno e delle loro lacune in materia di forza e di intenzioni in quest'arte [la scultura]. Perché se volessimo caratterizzare in assoluto lo spirito dell'intera scultura antica e di quella moderna sotto l'unico principio di una forma di rappresentazione artistica, potremmo definire, riassumendo, la prima plastica, la seconda pittoresca. [...] Hemsterhuis dice acutamente e giustamente: i nuovi scultori sono troppo pittori, gli antichi pittori, a quanto pare, troppo scultori.²⁶

Lascia stupefatti la fedeltà di A. W. Schlegel all'argomentazione hemsterhuisiana, specialmente per quanto riguarda l'individuazione delle caratteristiche della scultura neoclassica in relazione alla moderazione nell'espressione di azioni e di passioni:

Winckelmann e Hemsterhuis hanno sostenuto entrambi che gli antichi moderavano l'espressione nella rappresentazione di azioni violente o sceglievano momenti in cui essa non doveva aver ancora raggiunto il massimo grado perché ne avrebbe sofferto la bellezza. Hemsterhuis lo attribuiva più al fatto che una tale passione avrebbe interrotto il leggero e scorrevole contorno con inturgidimenti dei muscoli e piegature spigolose delle articolazioni.²⁷

Nelle successive *Lezioni sull'arte e sulla letteratura drammatica*, tenute a Vienna nel 1808, la distinzione tra plastica e pittoresco troverà un ulteriore sviluppo nella formulazione di due categorie estetiche ora riferite all'arte drammatica: il classico e il romantico. Al pari della "soluzione" hemsterhuisiana, anche la risposta approntata da A. W. Schlegel valorizza un approccio storico, sulla base del quale il confronto tra le due civiltà viene ricondotto alle differenze dello spirito che le contraddistingue: il teatro degli antichi, fondato su una religione che divinizza le forze naturali, esprime la loro consonanza perfetta con la natura, mentre quello dei moderni, sorto dall'esperienza del limite introdotta dal cristianesimo, presenta l'aspirazione asintotica all'infinito e alla compiutezza. Il confronto con la tradizione classica consente, quindi, il riconoscimento della specificità delle produzioni artistiche dei moderni, con il conseguente abbandono delle regole di rappresentazione dell'ideale e del criterio mimetico.²⁸ La *querelle* settecentesca si era ormai rinnovata in una

²⁶ A. W. Schlegel, *Kritische Schriften und Briefe II (Die Kunstlehre)*, hrsg. von E. Lohner, Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1963, p. 136. La traduzione riportata è di Michele Cometa (M. Cometa, *Postfazione*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, p. 82).

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 125.

²⁸ Cfr. A. Meier, «Come tutto è diverso presso noi moderni!». *L'invenzione del Classicismo come progetto romantico*, in A. Costazza (ed.), *Il romantico nel Classicismo, il classico nel Romanticismo*, p. 15-29. Per una panoramica sui rapporti tra Romanticismo e Classicismo, rimando a

nuova disputa che contrapponeva classici e romantici ma che, di fatto, continuava a sfruttare la vecchia dicotomia tra antico e moderno.

Nel saggio del 1797 *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, Friedrich Schlegel persegue il medesimo tentativo di superare, nel contesto dell'arte, l'opposizione tra gli antichi e i moderni.²⁹ Al riguardo, egli afferma:

Questo saggio sullo studio della poesia greca è [...] il tentativo [...] di comporre il lungo conflitto fra i non imparziali amici degli antichi e dei nuovi poeti e di ristabilire nel campo del bello, con una nettissima definizione dei confini, la concordia fra la cultura naturale e la cultura artificiale.³⁰

Il confronto con l'antichità costituisce, dunque, il punto di partenza per la costruzione di un'estetica propria dell'età moderna. Sulla base di una «nettissima definizione dei confini», in questo caso attraverso l'introduzione della nozione estetica di «interessante», tale nuova forma d'arte acquista una sua legittimità ed autonomia, sebbene rimanga dialetticamente legata all'antichità. L'«interessante» è, infatti, l'esito della corruzione della cultura naturale degli antichi ed è tale proprio poiché *riflette* sul rapporto tra ideale e reale che si determina a partire da quella rottura:

Il bello non è dunque l'ideale della poesia moderna ed è essenzialmente diverso dall'interessante. [...] Ora, se è possibile dimostrare che anche la più felice cultura naturale [...] non è in grado di realizzare compiutamente l'imperativo estetico [...] allora si sarà dimostrato che l'interessante, in quanto necessaria preparazione all'infinità perfettibilità dell'atteggiamento estetico, ha legittimità estetica.³¹

Dunque, tanto nel contesto della riflessione hemsterhuisiana sull'arte degli antichi e l'arte dei moderni quanto nelle riflessioni approntate dai romantici, la messa in discussione del criterio mimetico comporta la possibilità di una rappresentazione del bello non riconducibile ai criteri propri del classicismo – la semplicità del contorno, l'unità della figura, la quiete –, ma aperta alla rappresentazione dell'irregolare, dell'individuale, del ripugnante. La

G. Sampaolo, *L'utopia del Classicismo*, in M. Cometa (ed.), *L'età classico-romantica. La cultura letteraria in Germania tra Settecento e Ottocento*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2009, p. 8-36.

²⁹ Cfr. H. R. Jauss, *Friedrich Schlegels und Friedrich Schillers Replik auf die «Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes»*, in H. R. Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Frankfurt a. M., 1970; *La replica di Schlegel e di Schiller alla Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, in H. R. Jauss, *Storia della letteratura come provocazione*, a cura di P. Cresto-Dina, Bollati-Boringhieri, Torino, 1999, p. 90-128.

³⁰ F. Schlegel, *Sullo studio della poesia greca (1797)*, a cura di A. Lavagetto, Napoli, Guida, 1988, p. 58.

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 62-63.

modernità, che pure trae vantaggio dall'imitazione degli antichi, elabora, nell'ambito della produzione del bello artistico, dei principi propri. Tali principi non la connotano come un momento di decadenza rispetto al passato ma come una via differente attraverso cui l'individuo tenta, seppur asintoticamente, di ricomporre la propria originaria unità con il tutto.

3. La storicizzazione del rapporto tra gli antichi e i moderni nella *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*

Il «*parallèle*» tra gli antichi e i moderni si interseca, nell'opera filosofica hemsterhuisiana, con i temi della gnoseologia, della metafisica e della storia dell'umanità.

Nella *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti* l'oggetto della trattazione è, per l'appunto, la natura dell'uomo, la natura delle cose che sono fuori di lui e i rapporti tra l'uomo e tali cose. In altri termini, ad essere indagata è la conoscenza che l'uomo possiede del mondo ma anche la ricchezza del mondo rispetto ai limiti conoscitivi dell'uomo. Difatti, l'oggetto esiste indipendentemente dall'uomo («*hors de lui*»)³² ma anche *rispetto* all'uomo e ai suoi organi («*vis-à-vis de lui et de ses organes*»)³³ e cioè rispetto ai suoi mezzi di conoscenza, configurandosi in tal caso come «idea» alla quale poter attribuire un valore di verità:

in altre parole, l'oggetto rispetto a tale essere e ai suoi organi esiste realmente così come appare ad esso. [...] Vi prego di avere sempre presente tale riflessione, poiché è la sola che ci fornisce il diritto, per così dire, di aspirare alla conoscenza della verità.³⁴

L'acquisizione passiva di un'idea e, quindi, la sensazione di un oggetto esterno, rappresentano, tuttavia, uno stadio della conoscenza ancora rudimentale e primitivo. Difatti, perché l'uomo espliciti a pieno la propria natura senziente e razionale, che lo connota nei termini di un essere capace non soltanto di sentire ma anche di elaborare ragionamenti («l'essere che ha la facoltà di sentire, di pensare e di ragionare»)³⁵ occorrono i «segni», e cioè degli strumenti corrispondenti agli oggetti che consentono di rievocare le idee e di padroneggiarle all'interno di ragionamenti. L'uomo possiede, quindi, a

³² F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Wijsgerige Werken*, redactie M. J. Petry, Leeuwarden, Fryske, Academy, 2001, p. 16.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, p. 13.

³⁵ *Ivi*, p. 21.

differenza degli animali, la facoltà di servirsi di segni arbitrari e di realizzare operazioni tra le idee, i ragionamenti per l'appunto.

Sebbene più complesso di quello animale, il processo conoscitivo proprio dell'uomo rimane comunque limitato ai soli aspetti della realtà che possono essere colti mediante gli «organi» e, di conseguenza, l'essenza della realtà, la sua natura indipendente dall'uomo, rimane sconosciuta:

Ciò che egli ignora è l'essenza della materia [...]. Relativamente alla conoscenza dell'essenza della materia, per quanto l'anima riceva le sensazioni delle cose attraverso dei mezzi, essa non conoscerà mai l'essenza di una cosa, qualunque essa sia.³⁶

Il discorso hemsterhuisiano relativo alla conoscenza umana riconosce, quindi, la straordinaria ricchezza della realtà («*ce riche total*»)³⁷ al di là degli attributi che possono essere avvertiti dall'uomo, comunque limitati agli organi di senso e ai mezzi attraverso i quali egli entra in rapporto con tale realtà.³⁸

Si delinea, inoltre, accanto alla conoscenza dell'aspetto fisico e materiale guadagnata attraverso gli organi di senso e i mezzi che ne attuano le rispettive potenzialità, la possibilità di accedere, attraverso l'«organo morale», agli aspetti per così dire immateriali («*face morale*»), ma non per questo meno reali, dell'universo. La cifra distintiva della mediazione fornita dall'«organo morale» è riconducibile al fatto che «l'io stesso» diventa, tramite esso, oggetto di contemplazione, restituendo all'uomo la certezza della propria esistenza e rivelandogli non i rapporti che le cose esterne instaurano rispetto a lui (che in questo caso ne subisce passivamente l'azione) ma le relazioni che l'io stesso istituisce con la realtà esterna (anche in questo caso l'uomo riceve passivamente una sensazione, quella del dovere, ma tale sensazione si traduce in una funzione attiva, riconducibile all'agire morale).³⁹

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 33.

³⁷ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, p. 48.

³⁸ Per quanto concerne la nozione di 'organo' nella riflessione gnoseologica hemsterhuisiana e le differenze rispetto alle coeve concezioni della medesima, scrive E. Matassi: «Hemsterhuis all'interno di tale dibattito si colloca con una fisionomia peculiare; coerentemente con i suoi principi conoscitivi fonda infatti l'interpretazione dell'organo sulla 'mediazione' espletata, sul carattere di mediazione intrinseco al '*rapport*' piuttosto che sull'approfondimento fisiologistico della 'funzione'», E. Matassi, *Hemsterhuis. Istanza critica e filosofia della storia*, p. 103.

³⁹ Per quanto concerne l'aspetto sia passivo che attivo attribuito all'«organo morale» rinvio al seguente passaggio tratto dal dialogo *Simone o le facoltà dell'anima*: «tale principio, questo mezzo, siffatto organo morale, fornisce le sensazioni di tutto ciò che riguarda la morale. Tale organo ha due parti distinte: per l'una, l'anima è totalmente passiva [...]; per l'altra essa giudica, modifica, modera ed incita o calma queste sensazioni», F. Hemsterhuis, *Simone o le facoltà dell'anima*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, p. 578.

Vediamo ora in che termini tale premessa di ordine gnoseologico intervenga nel contesto del «*parallèle*» tra gli antichi e i moderni.

Il problema della conoscenza introduce una tesi cruciale per stabilire un confronto, sul piano della scienza per l'appunto, tra gli antichi e i moderni: la conoscenza umana è sempre imperfetta poiché mediata dal corpo, e tale mediazione non consente all'anima di acquisire *immediatamente* tutti gli attributi essenziali e tutti i rapporti che costituiscono la totalità del reale. La conoscenza o scienza umana consiste, invece, nell'insieme delle «idee primitive», cioè acquisite per mezzo degli organi, e delle «idee di rapporto», cioè ricavate dalle operazioni o dai ragionamenti condotti sulle idee primitive:

L'estensione delle conoscenze umane in generale o, piuttosto, la condizione dello spirito umano è misurata, quindi, dalla quantità di idee primitive acquisite attraverso gli organi, moltiplicata per la quantità delle idee di rapporto.⁴⁰

La perfezione della conoscenza umana è, quindi, sempre «misurata», cioè relativa all'estensione più o meno maggiore di tali parametri, le «idee primitive» e le «idee di rapporto»:

il grado di perfezione delle nostre conoscenze non aumenta solo in proporzione dell'accrescersi delle idee prime acquisite ed isolate, ma anche in ragione dell'accrescersi della quantità delle idee di rapporto.⁴¹

L'immagine introdotta da Hemsterhuis per rendere figurativamente lo stato della scienza umana nella sua condizione di imperfezione ma anche nella sua evoluzione sul piano storico è quella dell'orbita eccentrica percorsa dalle comete intorno al sole:

La scienza dell'uomo, o meglio dello spirito umano, sembra muoversi intorno alla perfezione come le comete intorno al sole, descrivendo curve fortemente eccentriche: anch'essa ha i suoi perieli e i suoi afeli. Tuttavia, proprio attraverso la storia, noi conosciamo bene all'incirca una rivoluzione e mezza.⁴²

Gli antichi (i Greci) e i moderni sono qui presentati come due «perieli» e accomunati, quindi, dalla medesima tensione di approssimazione dello spirito umano alla perfezione. I due «perieli» indicano, coerentemente con il loro significato sul piano astronomico, i punti della storia dell'uomo in cui

⁴⁰ *Ivi*, p. 77.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 81.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 79.

tale tentativo si avvicina maggiormente all'obiettivo, mantenendosi comunque in una direzione eccentrica.

Tale similitudine si offre ad una duplice interpretazione, gnoseologica e metafisica. Il sole intorno al quale le comete descrivono una traiettoria «eccentrica» rimanda, infatti, alla perfezione in senso gnoseologico, e cioè alla conoscenza di tutti gli attributi essenziali e di tutti i rapporti del reale (onniscienza) e, al contempo, alla perfezione in senso ontologico, e cioè all'«Essere intelligente» causa unica della totalità del reale, in altri termini all'unità o semplicità a cui l'individuo tende *naturalmente* come la parte tende verso il tutto.⁴³ Per verificare ulteriormente l'associazione di tale significato all'immagine del sole si veda il passaggio conclusivo del dialogo *Simone o le facoltà dell'anima* (1782):

Il più bel lavoro dell'uomo [...] è di imitare il sole e di sbarazzarsi dei suoi involucri nel più breve tempo possibile. Quando l'anima è interamente liberata essa diviene totalmente organo. Tutte le sensazioni si legano [...] e l'anima vede l'universo non in Dio, ma al modo degli dèi.⁴⁴

La perfezione intesa in senso assoluto risulta quindi fondata, al pari della perfezione «misurata» propria dell'uomo, sulla dimensione del *sentir* veicolato dagli organi, sebbene indichi una condizione di onniscienza in cui tale sentire diventa totale – l'anima diviene «totalmente organo» – e riceve le sensazioni di tutti gli aspetti e di tutti i rapporti dell'universo-totalità senza alcuna forma di mediazione, allo stesso modo di Dio:⁴⁵

Se l'uomo avesse le idee di tutti i rapporti e di tutte le combinazioni di questi oggetti, egli assomiglierebbe a Dio, sia per quanto concerne la scienza, sia per ciò che riguarda la condizione dell'universo quale noi lo conosciamo, e la sua scienza sarebbe perfetta.⁴⁶

⁴³ Sullo sviluppo di questa tesi nel contesto della filosofia hegeliana cfr. C. Melica *Longing for Unity: Hemsterhuis and Hegel*, «Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain», 55-56, 2007, p. 143-163.

⁴⁴ F. Hemsterhuis, *Simone o le facoltà dell'anima*, p. 588.

⁴⁵ Tale passaggio argomentativo mette in luce uno snodo fondamentale della metafisica hemsterhuisiana, e cioè il tentativo di salvare la funzione mediatrice svolta dagli organi anche postulando un loro trascendimento sul piano metafisico: «Tale trascendimento infatti non comporta un annullamento della funzione degli organi, che viene esaltata invece dalla possibilità di conseguire dopo la morte una conoscenza di aspetti dell'universo ancora ignoti [...]; conoscenza che implica dunque l'approfondimento e lo sviluppo piuttosto che la negazione della funzione sensoriale», E. Matassi, *Hemsterhuis. Istanza critica e filosofia della storia*, p. 79.

⁴⁶ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, p. 77.

L'immagine della traiettoria eccentrica percorsa dalle comete intorno al sole risulta, dunque, funzionale ad indicare il movimento di progressione infinita della conoscenza umana sul piano della storia, seppure in una direzione centrifuga rispetto alla perfezione intesa in senso assoluto. A questo primo significato se ne associa un secondo, di ordine metafisico, che, a rigor di logica, andrebbe considerato come prioritario, poiché fornisce le ragioni prime dell'eccentricità della condizione umana sul piano ontologico e, di conseguenza, gnoseologico. Nell'ambito della riflessione metafisica hemsterhuisiana, l'individuo e la realtà nel suo complesso si trovano in una «condizione forzata», essendo parti specifiche ed isolate che, *naturalmente*, tendono all'unità. Tuttavia, tale ricomposizione risulta impossibile poiché implicherebbe, come esito finale, l'identificazione della realtà con Dio, e quindi il rischio di una deriva panteistica. Di conseguenza, l'unità desiderata non può che attuarsi, almeno sul piano immanente, nei termini di una «coesistenza» tra le parti, realizzata dalle leggi naturali nell'ambito dei «rapporti» che regolano le diverse parti dell'universo fisico, e dalle leggi morali nell'ambito delle relazioni che legano gli esseri dotati di «velleità», e cioè le parti dell'universo morale:

È chiaro, tuttavia, che l'anima nei suoi desideri tende per sua natura, verso tale unione. Essa desidera un'approssimazione continua, come avviene tra l'iperbole con il suo asintoto.⁴⁷

La tesi circa una traiettoria “eccentrica” precipua della condizione umana troverà grande fortuna nell'opera di Friedrich Hölderlin.⁴⁸ Difatti, la circolazione dei testi hemsterhuisiani nel contesto tedesco di fine Settecento fu possibile grazie all'edizione in lingua tedesca a cura di Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg⁴⁹ e, successivamente, per mezzo dell'edizione francese curata da Hendrick Jonas Jansen.⁵⁰ Insieme con la riscoperta di Platone, nella

⁴⁷ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sui desideri*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, p. 525.

⁴⁸ Cfr. S. Helberger-Frobenius, *Hemsterhuis und die excentrische Bahn Hölderlins. Macht und Gewalt in der Philosophie Franz von Baaders*, Bonn, H. Bouvier, 1969.

⁴⁹ Cfr. F. Hemsterhuis, *Vermischte Philosophische Schriften des H. Hemsterhuis: Aus dem Französischen übersetzt*, hrsg. C. F. von Blanckenburg, Leipzig, Weidmann und Reich, 1782-1797.

⁵⁰ F. Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques de M. F. Hemsterhuis*, par Hendrick Jonas Jansen, voll. 2, Paris, Jansen, 1792. Secondo la ricostruzione fornita da Michele Cometa (cfr. M. Cometa, *Postfazione*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sulla scultura*, p. 71) fu proprio l'edizione curata da Jansen quella di cui parla Hölderlin in una lettera al fratello (cfr. F. Hölderlin, *Epistolario. Lettere e dediche*, tr. it. a cura di G. Bertocchini, Milano, Arielle, 2015, p. 106), quella di cui discutono i fratelli Schlegel e quella commentata da Novalis nelle *Hemsterhuis-Studien*. D'altra parte, però, l'edizione di Blanckenburg rappresentò per quegli stessi autori il primo canale di conoscenza della filosofia hemsterhuisiana. Pare infatti che Hölderlin

sua versione ficiniana, i testi del filosofo olandese contribuirono allo sviluppo della riflessione hölderliana in merito all'esistenza di una tensione *erotica* verso il divino, inevitabilmente asintotica data la limitatezza e la finitudine della condizione umana.⁵¹ In particolare, la lettura della *Lettera sui desideri* dovette contribuire a supportare la formulazione di uno dei temi centrali dell'*Iperione*, vale a dire la funzione di Amore come mediatore del contrasto tra l'impulso all'infinito e l'impulso alla limitazione, conducendo alla tesi di una direzione eccentrica propria della traiettoria umana ed emblematicamente riassunta dalla massima di Ignazio di Loyola riportata nel *Thalia Fragment*, il «voler essere in tutto e al di sopra di tutto».⁵²

Il tema dei due impulsi contrastanti propri della natura dell'uomo e di tutti gli enti finiti, e sulla base dei quali si determina la tensione infinita verso il divino, come avviene tra «l'iperbole e il suo asintoto», viene sviluppato anche da Johann Gottfried Herder nel saggio *Liebe und Selbstheit*.⁵³ Il breve testo, che costituisce un commento introduttivo alla *Lettera sui desideri*, di cui Herder aveva realizzato la prima traduzione in lingua tedesca, presenta il contrasto tra i due impulsi nei termini di una condizione essenziale perché vi sia la vita, intesa come uno stato di relazione tra le parti finite ed eterogenee dell'universo. La tendenza all'unione e l'impossibilità del suo definitivo conseguimento determinano, infatti, la condizione propria dell'equilibrio cosmico, che si realizza come coesistenza reciproca tra le sue parti:

Ciò ovviamente rende ogni godimento incompleto, ma è la vera misura e il vero pulsare della vita, la modulazione e l'economia del desiderio [...]. Devono essere suoni consonanti, non unisoni quelli che danno la melodia della vita e del godimento.⁵⁴

cominciò ad occuparsi di Hemsterhuis già negli anni 1790-1791, vale a dire prima della pubblicazione dell'edizione di Jansen. Su quest'ultimo punto si veda M. Drees, *Alexis im Hyperion? Bemerkungen zu Hölderlins Hemsterhuis-Rezeption*, in M. F. Fresco – L. Geeraedts – K. Hammacher (hrsg.), *Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790)*, p. 527-544.

⁵¹ Cfr. E. Polledri, *Friedrich Hölderlin e la fortuna di Platone nel Settecento tedesco*, «Aevum», III, 2000, p. 789-812.

⁵² F. Hölderlin, *Frammento di Iperione* (1794), a cura di C. Angelino, Genova, Il Melangolo, 1989, p. 17.

⁵³ J. G. Herder, *Liebe und Selbstheit*, «Der Teuscher Merkur», IV, 1781, p. 211-235; ora in J. G. Herder, *Schriften zu Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Altertum 1774-1787*, Frankfurt a. M., Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994, p. 405-424 (trad. it. a cura di S. Tedesco, *Amore ed egoità*, «Aisthesis», 1, 2009, p. 81-93). Per un approfondimento circa il significato del saggio herderiano si rimanda a M. C. Barbeta, *Amore e coscienza di sé. Una lettura del testo di J. G. Herder*, in G. Erle (ed.), *La valenza etica del cosmo*, Padova, Il Poligrafo, 2008, p. 171-198; S. Tedesco, *Economia del desiderio: piacere e conoscenza nella prima estetica di Herder*, «Aisthesis», 1, 2009, p. 131-140.

⁵⁴ J. G. Herder, *Amore ed egoità*, p. 91.

Tornando all'analisi della *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, i significati implicati dall'applicazione delle vicende astronomiche alla storia dell'uomo investono, evidentemente, il «*parallèle*» tra gli antichi e i moderni. In tal caso, l'autore olandese sottolinea la funzione decisiva svolta dalla storia ai fini della comprensione di tale rapporto, qui riletto all'interno della più ampia storia dell'umanità di cui gli antichi (i Greci) e i moderni rappresentano, per l'appunto, i due «*perielii*» fondamentali. Essi sono due momenti distinti nel *continuum* della storia e, tuttavia, parimenti contrassegnati da una condizione «*eccentrica*». All'uomo compete, infatti, un grado di perfezione sempre relativo ed unilaterale, e ciò vale tanto presso il perielio degli antichi (i Greci), laddove esso si esprime in quanto perfezione dello «*spirito morale*», quanto presso quello dei moderni, dove tale perfezione è «*misurata*», e quindi estesa, limitatamente allo «*spirito di geometria*» che li contraddistingue:

Nel nostro perielio, tale spirito universale potrebbe essere definito come spirito di geometria o di simmetria. Nel perielio dei Greci, potrebbe essere definito come spirito morale o sentimento.⁵⁵

La storicizzazione del rapporto tra gli antichi e i moderni scardina l'idea della superiorità di un modello rispetto all'altro ed introduce la tesi che vi riconosce due differenti espressioni della perfezione sul piano della conoscenza (così come nella *Lettera sulla scultura* viene riconosciuta la possibilità di due differenti espressioni della perfezione sul piano della rappresentazione del bello artistico): presso gli antichi tale perfezione, «*misurata*» rispetto allo «*spirito morale*», avrebbe avvantaggiato la morale, la politica e le belle arti, mentre presso i moderni la perfezione delle conoscenze in relazione allo «*spirito di geometria*» recherebbe un maggiore vantaggio alla geometria, all'aritmetica e alle scienze in generale.

Dunque, essendo la perfezione di ciascun perielio «*misurata*» ed unilaterale, né gli antichi né i moderni possono rivendicare una condizione di perfezione in senso assoluto ponendosi su un piano di superiorità e di esemplarità gli uni rispetto agli altri. In altri termini, entrambi i poli del «*parallèle*» esprimono la compiutezza e la perfezione di una specifica 'visione del mondo', quella geometrica dei moderni e quella morale degli antichi. È evidente, quindi, che sarebbe un errore metodologico estendere una certa visione del mondo, storicamente condizionata dallo «*spirito universale predominante*» di una data epoca, all'interpretazione della totalità dell'esperienza. In tal senso, il discorso hemsterhuisiano promuove l'emancipazione dell'esperienza morale dall'analisi geometrico-quantitativa

⁵⁵ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, p. 79.

moderna e, viceversa, l'emancipazione dell'esperienza fisica e naturale dall'approccio morale-qualitativo. A tal riguardo, Elio Matassi scrive:

L'*Ansatz* classico-greco, che aveva illuminato il mondo morale nella sua complessità e quello geometrico moderno possono trovare un punto di incontro solo sulla base della consapevolezza del loro 'limite' intrinsecamente storico.⁵⁶

4. Gli antichi e i moderni, «au soin de se perfectionner»

La storicizzazione del rapporto tra antichi e moderni, presentati come i due pericoli della curva eccentrica percorsa dallo spirito umano intorno alla perfezione, riporta gli antichi su un piano di «perfettibilità» pari a quello dei moderni precludendo, ad entrambi, il conseguimento della perfezione in senso assoluto (per le ragioni metafisiche di cui si è detto in precedenza) e riconoscendo, però, ad entrambi, una qualche compiutezza e perfezione dello «spirito». Tenteremo ora di verificare in che termini tale tesi venga riproposta, entro una diversa formulazione, nel dialogo *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*.

La filosofia della storia sottesa al mito dell'età dell'oro conferma il carattere progressivo ma circolare della traiettoria di sviluppo della cultura umana, conciliando l'idea del *progresso* della *Bildung* con quella del *ritorno* dello spirito umano ad uno stato di naturalità. In altri termini, il *continuum* della cultura umana configura l'itinerario storico ed immanente attraverso il quale l'individuo tenta di approssimarsi alla perfezione (intesa in senso assoluto) e di inverare, riconoscendosi «omogeneo» con l'origine, la propria natura metafisica. Il «lavoro» dell'uomo si esprime, nel progresso storico dell'umanità, come «cura della perfezione»,⁵⁷ essendo un processo attraverso il quale egli tenta di elevarsi dalla condizione sensibile e limitata in cui si trova, e che pure lo specifica sul piano della sua esistenza storica, alla perfezione in senso assoluto, e cioè alla piena realizzazione della propria natura metafisica. Hemsterhuis abbraccia, quindi, una concezione della storia sostanzialmente progressista, leggibile, pur con le necessarie distinzioni, anche attraverso la polarità romantica ingenuità-riflessione o, altrimenti, natura-spirito.⁵⁸ L'età dell'oro descritta da Esiodo configurerebbe,

⁵⁶ E. Matassi, *Hemsterhuis. Istanza critica e filosofia della storia*, p. 115.

⁵⁷ F. Hemsterhuis, *Simone o le facoltà dell'anima*, p. 588.

⁵⁸ Su questo punto E. Matassi scrive: «Tale polarità trasforma profondamente il significato complessivo del mito classico; mentre il pensiero antico aveva sempre congiunto strettamente l'epoca aurea al pessimismo della circolarità della storia, la interpretazione hemsterhuisiana della perfettibilità sta ad attestare un ottimismo di fondo, che rende impossibile il ritorno alle origini quale semplice restaurazione del passato», E. Matassi, *Hemsterhuis. Istanza critica e filosofia della storia*, p. 146.

nell'analisi hemsterhuisiana, la condizione originaria ed ingenua dell'umanità, ancora fondata sulla sua appartenenza all'ordine e alla compiutezza della natura. L'allontanamento da tale condizione, connesso con l'emergere della riflessione e con il suo progressivo affinamento, non esclude, però, un movimento di ritorno, ora consapevole e riflessivo, ad un'età felice più eccelsa, in futuro. Siffatta linea interpretativa, secondo la quale l'età dell'oro non implica un movimento di ritorno al passato ma, al contrario, un avanzamento da collocarsi nel futuro, verrà ripresa e sviluppata nel contesto romantico.⁵⁹ Quella prospettata da Hemsterhuis è, quindi, una complessa dinamica del movimento storico capace di congiungere il passato con il futuro, proiettando in avanti la condizione aurea dell'umanità primitiva:

l'uomo divenne un essere infelice sulla terra, fino a quando il saggio gli insegnò con una filosofia illuminata a collegare di nuovo il presente con il futuro e a riconoscere l'omogeneità della sua esistenza eterna.⁶⁰

È ragionevole ipotizzare che la teoria della storia sviluppata nel dialogo *Alessio o l'età dell'oro* rappresenti una risposta al quesito conclusivo della precedente *Lettera sui desideri*:

si tratterà di esaminare più da vicino sia questa tendenza, sia l'approssimazione che ne risulta e se la natura di tale approssimazione sia infinita o se deve terminare con l'unione.⁶¹

La soluzione hemsterhuisiana a tale interrogativo – se l'approssimazione alla perfezione sia infinita o se, invece, termini con l'unione – si articola principalmente, come si tenterà di dimostrare, attraverso lo sdoppiamento dell'età dell'oro, e cioè attraverso l'ipotesi di due differenti scenari futuri per l'umanità *caduta*, uno sul piano metafisico e uno sul piano storico, funzionali a valorizzare tanto la realizzazione ultraterrena della natura umana quanto il suo perfezionamento progressivo sul piano immanente. Sulla base di questa seconda prospettiva, la futura età dell'oro viene presentata come l'esito di uno sforzo prettamente umano, cioè centrato sulle conquiste maturate in seno allo sviluppo storico dell'umanità – «quando arricchito di tutte le conoscenze di cui la sua natura quaggiù è capace»⁶² –. Sul piano metafisico, invece, l'età dell'oro configurerebbe una condizione nella quale l'anima, cioè

⁵⁹ Cfr. A. Nivala, *The Romantic Idea of the Golden Age in Friedrich Schlegel's Philosophy of History*, New York, Routledge, 2017.

⁶⁰ F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, p. 297.

⁶¹ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sui desideri*, p. 525-526.

⁶² F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, p. 298.

l'essenza metafisica dell'uomo, proiettata «dopo questa vita»,⁶³ sarà finalmente libera dai confini sensibili del corpo e dunque in qualche modo «omogenea» a Dio:

È in quel momento che i nostri rapporti con gli dèi divengono più immediati e l'universo si manifesta da più lati [...]. È allora che il brillante spettacolo delle ricchezze dell'anima umana si mostra scoperto ed è in quel momento, infine, che noi penetriamo nel futuro [...].⁶⁴

È ragionevole ravvisare in tale duplicazione della futura età dell'oro una riformulazione del significato assunto dalla nozione di «perfezione» nella *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, laddove si individua il medesimo sdoppiamento semantico espresso dalla differenza che intercorre tra la perfezione «misurata» e la perfezione in senso assoluto, sebbene quest'ultima sia lì associata ad una traiettoria eccentrica e, quindi, infinitamente asintotica.

Dunque, nel dialogo *Alessio o l'età dell'oro il «parallèle»* tra gli antichi e i moderni e la filosofia della storia ad esso connessa subiscono un'ulteriore riformulazione, ora sulla base di una prospettiva, per così dire, *poetica*. A fornire gli strumenti ermeneutici utili ad intendere la condizione degli uomini nel tempo e, quindi, anche il confronto tra gli antichi e i moderni, non è più la storia ma il mito e, più precisamente, il mito esiodeo dell'età dell'oro.

Nella prima parte del dialogo, il mito dell'età dell'oro viene riformulato all'interno di una trattazione che, partendo dallo 'stato di natura', intende dimostrare che «la natura umana non è corrotta e che l'età dell'oro di Esiodo non è una menzogna».⁶⁵ Nella condizione primitiva presentata, per l'appunto, come una sorta di 'stato di natura', l'uomo, al pari dell'animale, sperimenta uno stato di equilibrio tra i propri bisogni e la possibilità di appagarli e, non essendosi ancora affermata l'idea di proprietà privata, ciascuno può far valere il proprio diritto sulla terra in proporzione alla forza di cui dispone. Tuttavia, l'osservazione del «mondo attuale» mette in luce la sua immensa differenza rispetto al «mondo primitivo» e, muovendo dall'evidenza di tale differenza, che segnala l'interruzione dell'eguaglianza uomo-animale, il dialogo procede ad indagare le ragioni che avrebbero condotto l'umanità da una condizione all'altra. Il «principio di perfettibilità» gioca, a tal riguardo, un ruolo fondamentale. Tale principio trova adeguata spiegazione all'interno della più generale dinamica del desiderio, essendo associato alla sfera della volontà e dell'azione, sebbene si manifesti, nella sua accezione più infima, come «istinto», e cioè come una sensazione che determina la volontà «necessaria-

⁶³ *Ibidem*

⁶⁴ F. Hemsterhuis, *Simone o le facoltà dell'anima*, p. 588.

⁶⁵ F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, p. 242.

mente» e che si compone dell'avvertimento di un bisogno e di quello di un oggetto che lo soddisfa:

L'istinto consiste [...] in un desiderio, in una sensazione unica, composta, tuttavia, dalla sensazione di un bisogno e da quella di un oggetto che potrebbe soddisfarlo. [...] Essendo unico, esso determina la volontà necessariamente e in modo unico.⁶⁶

La dinamica del desiderio e la sensazione di godimento che ne deriva non sarebbero comprensibili senza la postulazione del «principio di perfettibilità», presente tanto nell'uomo quanto nell'animale:

Tale principio presuppone necessariamente due cose: l'una che la natura dell'animale sia capace di una condizione più felice di quella attuale; l'altra, è data dalla sensazione di una condizione migliore rispetto a quella in cui si trova.⁶⁷

L'uomo e l'animale, quindi, obbediscono alla medesima legge naturale sulla quale, tra l'altro, si costruisce la loro esistenza felice ed immediata nel mondo. Nella condizione primitiva, evidentemente, non vi è spazio per alcuna istanza di libertà, dal momento che il desiderio, in quanto istinto, si compone di due sole sensazioni *determinate*, cioè di una corrispondenza univoca e necessaria tra la sensazione di un bisogno e l'oggetto in grado di appagarla.⁶⁸ In ogni caso, nella condizione primitiva, allorché la sensazione di un bisogno è *determinata* dall'oggetto «fisico» in grado di soddisfarla, l'uomo e l'animale sperimentano una qualche forma di godimento, nonostante gli ostacoli che la natura pone loro: «essi sono felici e, per l'animale, consiste in ciò la sua età dell'oro».⁶⁹ A questo punto l'equivalenza uomo-animale viene meno. Se l'animale, in virtù della corrispondenza *necessaria* tra un bisogno e l'oggetto «fisico» in grado di appagarlo, potrà conseguire immediatamente la propria età dell'oro, l'uomo dipende, invece, da una «condizione diversa», per la quale il «principio di

⁶⁶ *Ivi*, p. 253.

⁶⁷ *Ivi*, p. 246.

⁶⁸ Per quanto concerne questo passaggio rinvio alla sintesi fornita da E. Matassi: «Se in ultima analisi cerchiamo di descrivere lo stato dell'uomo e dell'animale nel momento più immediato della loro esistenza possiamo sintetizzarlo nelle seguenti condizioni: a) tutta la ricchezza dell'immaginazione sussiste solo in due sentimenti (quello della necessità e quella dell'oggetto che possa appagarlo); b) la morale non sussiste affatto; c) l'intelletto contempla solo questi due sentimenti o idee quali oggetti della sua volontà; d) la capacità di volere è priva di scelta effettiva, perché in questo caso la scelta dovrebbe vertere tra il sentimento della necessità e quello di un oggetto che l'appaghi», E. Matassi, *Hemsterhuis. Istanza critica di filosofia della storia*, p. 150.

⁶⁹ F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, p. 263.

perfettibilità» si associa ad una volontà *indeterminata* e, per ciò stesso, *libera*. Nell'approfondimento del «principio di perfettibilità» si profila, quindi, un'istanza specificatamente umana, e cioè la «speranza», «che ha per fine costante il migliore in assoluto, benché indeterminato». ⁷⁰ In altri termini, i desideri dell'uomo, in quanto *indeterminati*, non trovano alcun limite sensibile, cioè alcun oggetto «fisico» e determinato in grado di appagarli, almeno nella sua «condizione attuale». Il progresso delle conoscenze, che amplia l'orizzonte delle sensazioni e, dunque, dei desideri, conduce l'uomo al disprezzo del godimento «fisico» e, al contempo, al tentativo di trovare in esso l'«analogo» dei propri desideri:

Egli andò oltre e poiché desideri vaghi ed indeterminati, in mancanza di oggetti analoghi che potessero soddisfarli, gli causavano sofferenze, egli cercò questi oggetti, seppure inutilmente, nel mondo finito e determinato che trovava a portata di mano. Di qui l'insaziabilità naturale dei desideri, [...] egli si spinse oltre nella vana e folle speranza di trovare nella quantità degli oggetti finiti e determinati quell'infinito analogo al grande principio indeterminato che lo muoveva. ⁷¹

La caduta dell'uomo dall'equilibrio della condizione primitiva, associata alla ricerca di un «infinito analogo» ai propri desideri, che ritornerà ancora nel famoso frammento novalisiano – «Noi cerchiamo ovunque l'incondizionato, e troviamo sempre soltanto cose» ⁷² –, non determina, però, la corruzione della sua natura. Al contrario, essa documenta «che il suo imbastardirsi era solo un'apparenza accidentale». ⁷³ Tentiamo di spiegare meglio quest'ultimo passaggio.

Il problema qui introdotto è strettamente associato alla tesi dell'immortalità dell'anima, e cioè della natura metafisica dell'uomo in quanto «essere eterno». La sua esistenza storica configurerebbe, nel quadro teorico delineato dall'autore nederlandese, un'«apparenza accidentale», e cioè una condizione transitoria nella quale l'uomo assume la morfologia di un

⁷⁰ *Ivi*, p. 294.

⁷¹ *Ivi*, p. 295.

⁷² Cfr. Novalis, *Opera filosofica*, a cura di G. Moretti - F. Desideri, I, Torino, Einaudi, 1993, p. 356. Per un approfondimento della questione del limite in Novalis, rimando a G. Stanchina, *Il limite generante. Analisi delle Fichte Studien di Novalis*, Milano, Guerini e Associati, 2002. Sarebbe auspicabile integrare tale ricerca con l'analisi delle *Hemsterhuis Studien*, al fine di chiarire il ruolo della filosofia hemsterhuisiana nell'articolazione del superamento del limite, con specifico riguardo alla funzione dell'«organo morale». Per un maggiore approfondimento sulle *Hemsterhuis Studien* cfr. G. Moretti, *Le Hemsterhuis-Studien e il loro ruolo nello sviluppo dell'estetica novalisiana*, in G. Moretti, *L'estetica di Novalis*, Torino, 1991, p. 61-77.

⁷³ F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, p. 296.

essere «anfibo», sperimentando un'esistenza segnata dalla finitudine, dall'imperfezione delle proprie conoscenze e dal limite «fisico», benché animata da desideri *indeterminati* che lo spingono ad elevarsi, attraverso la dimensione estetica e morale, alla propria destinazione metafisica:

Se l'uomo, che è solo un animale su questa terra, ha in sé un principio che, per sua natura, l'ha già condotto infinitamente al di là della sua felicità e della sua perfezione come abitante della terra [...], è del tutto evidente che l'esistenza dell'uomo in questo mondo è solo passeggera e che, per sua natura, riguarda tutt'altra cosa.⁷⁴

Nella parte conclusiva del dialogo si profila, quindi, uno sdoppiamento dell'età dell'oro, ora assunta come una prospettiva da collocarsi nel futuro. Il tema dello *sdoppiamento* acquisisce un significato preciso proprio in virtù del carattere «anfibo» dell'uomo – per l'appunto, doppio –, interposto tra l'esistenza storica – «accidentale» ma non per questo trascurabile – e la propria natura metafisica:

L'età dell'oro è un'espressione figurata attraverso la quale voi comprendete [...] la condizione di un essere qualsiasi, il quale gode di tutta la felicità di cui la sua natura e il suo modo di essere attuali sono capaci.⁷⁵

Tale dualità si configura come «apparente» poiché nell'uomo permane, nei termini di un desiderio *indeterminato*, la tensione a recuperare la propria natura metafisica, sebbene tale tensione non implichi una mera restaurazione di ciò che era in precedenza, cioè della sua appartenenza *necessaria* alla compiutezza naturale, ma una conquista da conseguire *liberamente* nell'ambito dei progressi del suo «spirito». Anche nel contesto romantico, con particolare riguardo per la riflessione di A. W. Schlegel, si insiste sulla tesi di una «doppia» natura per indicare le contraddizioni proprie della condizione umana:

I Greci vedevano l'ideale della natura umana nella felice proporzione delle facoltà e nel loro armonico accordo. I moderni all'incontro hanno il profondo sentimento d'una interna disunione, d'una doppia natura nell'uomo che rende questo ideale impossibile a effettuarsi: la loro

⁷⁴ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettere sulla società, la storia e la politica*, in F. Hemsterhuis, *Opere*, p. 369.

⁷⁵ F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, p. 292.

poesia aspira di continuo a conciliare, a unire intimamente i due mondi fra i quali ci sentiamo divisi, quello dei sensi e quello dell'anima.⁷⁶

Lo schema presentato può essere ricondotto, in una qualche misura, ad una matrice neoplatonica, in quanto prevede che ad un movimento discensivo di *caduta* (dalla condizione di «essere eterno» a quella di essere finito) segua un movimento ascendente (dalla condizione di essere finito a quella di «essere eterno»).⁷⁷ I due movimenti si inscrivono, poi, all'interno di una traiettoria di sviluppo di cui il ritorno non rappresenta una mera restaurazione ma un recupero della perfezione e della compiutezza originarie entro una condizione più elevata perché nutrita dalle conquiste della ragione nell'ambito dell'esperienza storica.⁷⁸

L'uomo, come abitante della terra, tornerà indietro, correggerà i suoi difetti e vedrà di nuovo sullo stesso pianeta un'età dell'oro infinitamente superiore.⁷⁹

Lo sdoppiamento della futura età dell'oro rappresenta, dunque, il tentativo di valorizzare, accanto alla sua *naturale* destinazione metafisica, il progresso dell'uomo nel corso della sua esistenza storica.

Sul piano della storia, la futura età dell'oro coincide con l'acquisizione, da parte dell'uomo, della consapevolezza del carattere finito e limitato delle proprie conoscenze, con il conseguente ristabilimento della proporzione tra i propri desideri e ciò di cui può godere nella sua esistenza immanente. Sul piano metafisico, l'età dell'oro – che ora non è l'astro di una traiettoria eccentrica ma un traguardo raggiungibile, sebbene difficilmente pensabile da un punto di vista umano⁸⁰ – configura una condizione di liberazione dai limiti fisico-sensoriali e di conseguimento dell'«omogeneità» con l'origine:

⁷⁶ A. W. Schlegel, *Corso di letteratura drammatica* (1809), a cura di G. Gherardini, Genova, Il Melangolo, 1977, p. 19.

⁷⁷ Per gli aspetti platonici presenti nella riflessione filosofica hemsterhuisiana rinvio ai preziosi studi di Vieillard-Baron: J. L. Vieillard-Baron, *Hemsterhuis platonicien*, «Dix-Huitième Siècle», VII, 1975, p. 129-146; J. L. Vieillard-Baron, *La Transmission du texte platonicien par le cercle de Münster*, J. F. Kleuker, «Revue de métaphysique et de morale», 1, 1976, p. 39-61; J. L. Vieillard-Baron, *Platonisme et antiplatonisme dans l'Aufklärung finissante: Hemsterhuis et Fichte*, «Archives de Philosophie», 48, 1985, p. 591-603.

⁷⁸ Ritroviamo il medesimo schema di filosofia della storia anche nel pensiero di Friedrich Schlegel, laddove viene ripresa l'idea della caduta dell'uomo dalla condizione naturale e, insieme, quella dell'infinità perfettibilità che lo proietta in avanti in una futura età dell'oro (cfr. F. Schlegel, *Sullo studio della poesia greca*, p. 62-62).

⁷⁹ F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettere sulla società, la storia e la politica*, p. 369.

⁸⁰ Per quanto concerne la difficoltà di rappresentare razionalmente l'età dell'oro nel futuro, sul piano della sua realizzazione metafisica, rinvio al seguente passaggio: «Per sapere qualcosa di più sull'ultima età bisogna ricorrere agli oracoli degli dèi; occorre che un soffio divino

Per quanto riguarda l'età dell'oro dell'uomo dopo questa vita, i suoi godimenti saranno più intimi e coerenti, e tutte le sue conoscenze si confonderanno, come i colori dell'arcobaleno si confondono con il fuoco di un cristallo e formano una luce pura solo nel loro insieme, perfetta immagine dell'astro brillante che li portò nel suo seno.⁸¹

In conclusione, il dialogo hemsterhuisiano *Alessio o l'età dell'oro* ribadisce, in merito al «*parallèle*» tra gli antichi e i moderni, la medesima posizione espressa nella *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, sebbene da un punto di vista più generale che chiama in causa i principi – il «principio di perfettibilità», innanzitutto – che regolano l'esistenza dell'uomo sul piano storico e che, al di là delle differenti tappe di progressione dello «spirito», lo connotano, in ogni epoca, nei termini di un essere «anfibia». In altre parole, viene messa in risalto, entro un sostanziale approfondimento dei principi che la regolano, la condizione ontologica propria dell'uomo, intesa come elemento comune tanto agli antichi quanto ai moderni.

La trattazione, così impostata, sposta il *focus* dell'indagine dalle differenze che intercorrono tra lo «spirito» degli antichi e quello dei moderni, e cioè tra due differenti tappe del progresso delle conoscenze sul piano storico ed immanente, al rapporto che lega entrambi alla natura e che mette in luce l'uguaglianza dei due poli del «*parallèle*» sul piano ontologico. In ultimo, l'attenzione per l'individuo in quanto tale riporta al centro dell'indagine la funzione svolta dall'«organo morale» nell'orientare il progresso storico degli uomini verso la «perfezione»:

Per l'individuo è infinitamente importante sapere se, nella sua sfera, che probabilmente si amplierà per tutta l'eternità, la sua attività si indirizza verso l'Essere supremo e verso l'ordine che conosce con la coscienza. Oppure se egli se ne allontana di secolo in secolo. In questo secondo caso quest'organo, cioè la coscienza, diventa più sensibile ed attiva solo per fargli percepire più vivamente la distanza immensa che lo separa dalla sua felicità.⁸²

Come anticipato all'inizio di questo paragrafo, tale concezione del movimento della storia, incentrata sulla ripresa del mito dell'età dell'oro e capace di unire l'ammirazione per i tempi antichi con la tensione verso il futuro, trova grande sviluppo anche presso i romantici. Recenti studi hanno insistito su tale aspetto, talvolta chiamando in causa proprio il ruolo assunto

avvicini le nostre idee a tal punto da poter percepire tutti i loro rapporti», F. Hemsterhuis, *Alessio o l'età dell'oro*, p. 298.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*

⁸² F. Hemsterhuis, *Lettera sull'uomo e i suoi rapporti*, p. 85.

dalla ricezione della riflessione hemsterhuisiana nel contesto tedesco. Si pensi, per esempio, al prezioso lavoro di Laure Cahen-Maurel sulla ricezione di Schiller e di Hemsterhuis in Novalis,⁸³ agli studi di Asko Nivala dedicati alla riflessione filosofica di Friedrich Schlegel sul tema dell'età dell'oro⁸⁴ e al testo di Michele Cometa a proposito del complesso tessuto di miti, di metafore e di simboli che sostanziarono lo sviluppo della letteratura e del pensiero dell'età di Goethe.⁸⁵

In definitiva, la fecondità delle idee hemsterhuisiane nel contesto romantico, pur nella consapevolezza dell'inservibilità di una prospettiva storiografica incentrata sull'idea del "precorrimento", rappresenta un aspetto, in certa misura ancora inedito, utile per arricchire la nostra conoscenza circa il movimento di testi e di idee all'interno di una delle stagioni culturali più significative della modernità.

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⁸³ L. Cahen-Maurel, *L'Âge d'or future: Novalis relu à partir de Schiller et de Hemsterhuis. Le chiasme philosophique du mythe et de l'histoire dans "La Chrétienté ou l'Europe"*, «Klesis – Revue philosophique», 40, 2018, p. 1-32.

⁸⁴ A. Nivala, *The Romantic Idea of the Golden*.

⁸⁵ M. Cometa, *Il romanzo dell'Infinito*.

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Thinking Elasticity in Hemsterhuis, Novalis, and Beyond

*Jocelyn Holland**

ABSTRACT

The essay focuses on writers who explored elasticity's metaphorical potential and allowed scientific perspectives of various phenomena associated with it to inform their philosophical and poetic writings. It argues that Hemsterhuis sets a precedent for speculative thinking about elasticity that is then integrated and expanded within Early German Romanticism and *Naturphilosophie*. It also shows how, around 1800, the philosophical discussions of elasticity are just as interested in metaphors of coil-springs as they are in those elastic phenomena that involve the media of light or air, and how Novalis proposes a way to synthesize these diverse yet related metaphors.

Keywords: science, elasticity, German romanticism, *Naturphilosophie*, Hemsterhuis, Schelling, Novalis

RÉSUMÉ

L'article se concentre sur les auteurs ayant exploité le potentiel métaphorique de l'élasticité et ordonné leurs écrits philosophiques et poétiques aux perspectives scientifiques des divers phénomènes qui lui sont associés. On soutient que la philosophie de Hemsterhuis sert de modèle de pensée spéculative sur l'élasticité au premier romantisme allemand et à la *Naturphilosophie*, qui lui donneront un prolongement inédit. On montre également dans quelle mesure les discussions philosophiques portant sur l'élasticité autour de 1800 s'intéressent tout autant aux métaphores des ressorts hélicoïdaux qu'aux phénomènes élastiques impliquant l'air ou la lumière ; et en quoi Novalis propose une façon de synthétiser ces métaphores diverses mais apparentées.

Mots-clés : science, élasticité, romantisme allemand, *Naturphilosophie*, Hemsterhuis, Schelling, Novalis

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Elasticity is a commonplace word, likely to conjure images as simple as a stretched rubber band snapping back into place.¹ In such contexts, elasticity is a relatively easy construct to visualize: a figure of departure and return in which materials are deformed before restoring themselves to an approximation of their prior shape. The ubiquity of phenomena associated with the concept of elasticity also makes it a core concept in introductory physics textbooks, where it appears in the context of collisions,² the properties of springs,³ and as an example of potential energy. Yet however familiar these examples may be, they are not sufficient when it comes to a historical understanding of how elasticity was envisioned around 1800, and the ways in which physical descriptions of elasticity in the empirical sciences were transported into speculative discourses. The situation is complicated in part by the fact that there were a number of related words in circulation. In the German context around 1800, which I will focus on after setting the stage with the Dutch philosopher Hemsterhuis' groundbreaking metaphors of elasticity, the terms *Schnellkraft*, *Federkraft*, *Spannkraft*, and *Elasticität* could each make a legitimate case for being translated into "elasticity" in English. A second problem is that, along with the proliferation of technical terms, there was also a fundamental disagreement as to the origins of the phenomena associated with elasticity. Gehler's *Physical Dictionary*, the standard resource for recording the state of scientific knowledge at the end of the eighteenth century, has a section in its entry on elasticity devoted to "origins of the phenomenon" which begins with the joint disclaimers "we don't know anything about it" and "we are further behind in the explanation of this phenomenon compared to other phenomena" (Gehler 698). And yet a third challenge when it comes to describing the crossover between the empirical sciences and speculative thinking about elasticity has to do with the fact that the very different contexts in which elastic phenomena were described took speculative thought into distinct directions. It is one thing to work with the image of a weighted spring bouncing up and down before coming to rest, and quite another to use as a metaphor the image of the "elastic material" of light expanding in a three-dimensional volume.

Though an established scientific concept since Newton's day, the metaphorical potential of elasticity was only gradually realized in the years

¹ Thank you to Edgar Landgraf for providing feedback on a first draft of this essay.

² An "elastic collision" is defined as "one in which no [kinetic energy] is converted into other forms of energy, whereas an "inelastic collision" is "one in which some [kinetic energy] is converted to other forms of energy" (Benjamin Crowell, *Newtonian Physics* (1998-2001), p. 84.

³ Hooke's law states that the force one needs to extend or compress a spring is in a linear proportion to the distance.

leading up to 1800. Goethe, for example, is much more interested in deploying *Elasticität* in descriptions of weather phenomena during his voyage to Italy than he is in incorporating it into his dramas, novels, and poetry.⁴ Yet there were a few writers who explored elasticity's metaphorical potential by allowing scientific perspectives to inform their philosophical and poetic writings, writers whose work can offer an introduction to the emergence of speculative thinking about elasticity. The most important of these is François Hemsterhuis. Already in the 1770s, his philosophical dialogues connect the physics of elastic phenomena with metaphysical speculations, and they possess a degree of detail and breadth unrivaled by later writers. That said, among some writers associated with Early German Romanticism and German *Naturphilosophie* there is also a palpable interest in metaphors of elasticity. Around 1800, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Carl von Eschenmayer, and Friedrich Schelling each engaged, in a novel way, in a kind of speculative thinking about elasticity.

The present essay is primarily concerned with the work done with elasticity as metaphor. It keeps in the forefront those aspects of elasticity that were present in late eighteenth-century science while exploring how the metaphor of elasticity was integrated into various contexts to test out speculative ideas. The two main goals of the essay are therefore to help draft a new chapter in the philosophical history of elastic phenomena and also to compare how Hemsterhuis and the later German writers integrate this scientific concept into their philosophical and poetic thinking. The fact that elasticity is a relatively unexplored concept in poetic and philosophical discourses may be due to a certain semantic confusion associated with it, as will be explored more closely below. It may also be due to the fact that "elastic" phenomena could encompass a very broad spectrum of materials, even including light, which was considered by some eighteenth-century scientists to be the least dense of materials. Such a broad spectrum translated into metaphors of elasticity that accomplish very different purposes, as the following pages will show.

⁴ In notes from September of 1786 made near the Brenner Pass, Goethe refers both to the "elasticity of water" and to the "elasticity of air" as it relates to cloud formation (MA 3.1, 32). He also reflects on his use of the term: "Ich habe das Wort Elastizität, statt des in dieser Materie auch gewöhnlichen Wortes Schwere gebraucht, und es ist auch besser. Überhaupt aber sind meine Kunstwörter nicht die besten, komme ich zurück, so wollen wir meine Bemerkungen und Erfahrungen mit den Grundsätzen der Phisiker [sic] ihren Theorien und Erfahrungen zusammen halten. Ich bin leider nicht gelehrt wie du [Charlotte von Stein] weißt" (ibid.).

1. Elasticity's Plurality

Gehler's heading for *Elasticität* in his physical dictionary has a peculiar feature. While it is common for a heading to be followed by its equivalents in Latin, French, English, and other languages (such as the case with *Elektricität*, under which one finds *Electricitas*, *Electricité*, and *Electricity*), the one for *Elasticität* stands out for being followed first by three etymologically distinct German terms, as well as others from Latin and French:

Elasticität

Schnellkraft, Federkraft, Spannkraft, Elasticitas, Elater, Contentio, Palintonia, Elasticité, Ressort (Gehler 695)

The root meanings of these terms encompass a broad semantic field. *Schnellen* denotes leaping; *spannen* and *contensio* refer to the tension between two points. *Elasticitas* and *Elater* both give the sense of something that is being pushed away, which corresponds to the French *sortir*, the basis of the French word for spring, *Ressort*. For its part, *Palintonia*, as the Latinized form of the Greek *palintonos*, conveys the additional impression of a doubled, reversible movement back and forth. *Federkraft* takes its name for the German word for spring, *Feder*, thus relying on a biological metaphor whose original intuition – the “elasticity” of bird feathers – has almost entirely vanished.

As the proliferation of terms connected to the phenomenon of elasticity suggests, the semantic confusion has an epistemological basis. When Gehler clearly states that one does not know anything about the origin of elasticity (circa 1800, at least), he backs up his statement with a historical overview of attempts at explaining the basis of elasticity as a physical phenomenon that includes such names as Descartes, Newton, Johann Bernoulli, and 's Gravesande. From his overview, one can see that very different aspects of elastic phenomena were identified and discussed under the auspices of the general phenomenon, including the relative elasticity of solid, liquid, and gaseous materials, the transmission of sound, and others. A further example of how physical examples of elasticity can look very different from one another can be found in Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), where he begins by defining the general phenomenon as follows: “Elasticity (spring-force) is the capacity of a matter, *when its magnitude or figure are changed by another moving force, to reassume them again when this latter is diminished*” (Kant 68, italics in the original). However, Kant then goes on to distinguish between “expansive” and “attractive” elasticity. The term “expansive elasticity” is used to describe situations where an object expands

after being compressed. Expansive elasticity can be either original (as in the case of “the fundamental material of the fluid we call air”) or derivative, when it is coupled with a second phenomenon – Kant states that air has a “derivative elasticity in virtue of the matter of heat” (Kant 69). Attractive elasticity is, by contrast, “obviously derivative, as the term already shows” (Kant 68). In this case, Kant gives the example of an iron wire (such as a spring) that has been extended by a weight hanging upon it, and which snaps back into its original volume when the weight is removed. Not all scientific thinkers active around 1800 make the same distinction between “expansive” and “attractive” elasticity. Gehler’s synopsis of theories of elasticity mentions nothing of the sort. Modern science also finds no use for “attractive” and “expansive” elasticities, since these each concern one and the same phenomenon. But the distinction does matter for the current discussion – even if not in the way Kant intended – because it helps situate the phenomenon of elasticity more directly in the kind of thinking governed by polarities, already present in Hemsterhuis, that comes to dominate Romantic and nature-philosophical thinking at the end of the eighteenth century.

2. Hemsterhuis

Elena Tavani has shown that even if “like Newton,” Hemsterhuis understands attractive and repulsive forces as “ultimately responsible for various properties of bodies,” he also “extends analogically the same explanations to the various relationships and properties of minds and souls and, therefore, he attributes to force a content that goes clearly beyond all its empirical effects” (Tavani 164). This idea certainly holds true for how Hemsterhuis uses the idea of elasticity in his writings. Understanding elasticity within a polarity that manifests in terms of action expanding either away or returning towards a central point not only helps bring Hemsterhuis and German Romantic and nature-philosophical thinking into dialogue, doing so can help complicate what Wiep van Bunge has referred to as the “three categories of secondary literature on Hemsterhuis” categorized by importance of his work for German philosophers such as Jacobi, Herder, Novalis, and the Schlegel brothers, the significance of Hemsterhuis’s Newtonianism, and his connections to Greek philosophy.⁵ But what a focus on a particular mechanical concept in Hemsterhuis’s writing such as elasticity (rather than on the concepts of attraction and repulsion more generally) can accomplish is to help show how scientific ideas interact with areas of thought traditionally

⁵ Wiep, “The Philosopher as Escape Artist,” 172.

subsumed under aesthetics and morality. One finds this kind of crossover, for example, when images connected to the mechanical concept of elasticity are deployed in metaphysical contexts, for example as a metaphor for the soul, an idea that connects Hemsterhuis and German Romanticism. In his essay *Letter on Man and His Relations* (1772), Hemsterhuis defines elasticity as a basic quality of the soul, and Novalis equates the soul with a spring (*Feder*) in his own writing. The metaphor can serve a dual purpose for both thinkers, at times signaling attraction, and at times engaging in a kind of innovative and “expansive” speculative thinking, much in the way that the expansion of the “fluid” medium of air was characterized as a kind of expansive elasticity. Hemsterhuis goes so far as to state that “everything is coil-spring,” and Novalis thinks of elasticity almost as broadly: in conjunction with such seemingly unrelated qualities as innocence and patience, in the context of thoughts in general, and also as a definitive feature of a poet’s creativity. For the purposes of the following discussion, then, attraction and repulsion will be subsumed under the phenomenon of elasticity; readers can keep these two orientations in mind – elasticity as movement away from the center, and elasticity as a kind of return to an attractive focal point – and will also be able to see how the use of one on the other tends to correlate to the degree of materiality in the physical or metaphorical context.

It is no simple matter to generalize the tendencies in Hemsterhuis’s thinking about elasticity, given that he tests out quite different aspects of it in the *Letter on Desires*, the *Letter on Man and his Relations*, *Aristaeus*, and *Simon*. As a metaphor, elasticity first appears in Hemsterhuis’s essays to describe an impulse that originates within ourselves and is directed outwardly. The *Letter on Desires* (1770), for example, describes how some people possess an internally generated “elasticity” that expresses itself in outward-reaching acts of love and desire. This may occur in moments of aesthetic appreciation of an external object, such as a painting or other work of art,⁶ even though such moments are also prone to the failure for their inability to achieve an ideal unity of one’s being and essence with the “beautiful thing” under regard (1.80).⁷ The perception of heterogeneity – that the statue or other object is,

⁶ Daniel Whistler reads Hemsterhuis’s “Letter on Desires” as the writing of someone “very influenced by the mechanistic sensualism of his French contemporaries” and for whom, as well, a “neoplatonic metaphysics” resides “beneath the empiricist terminology” (Whistler, “Discipline of Pious Reason,” 59). With regard to the soul’s desire for a perfect union with a desired object, Whistler writes “the comparison with Plotinus is revealing: as for Plotinus so for Hemsterhuis, to desire something is to desire to become one with it. Moreover, and also in line with Plotinus, such desire is a force of attraction inherent in all matter” (60).

⁷ All quotes are from the two-volume translation of Hemsterhuis’s early works and dialogues by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler. References are to volume and page number.

in its perfect beauty, so dissimilar to one's imperfect self – acts as a hard limit to the elastic expansiveness of desire. Hemsterhuis nonetheless salvages the value of this failure by suggesting that it only goes to prove the great sensitivity of those souls who “join the finest and most exquisite tact to this enormous internal elasticity that makes them love and desire furiously and sense [things] excessively – that is, to those souls who are either modified or disposed in such a way that their attractive force [i.e., the force of their attraction directed toward external objects, J.H.] finds as few obstacles [as possible] in its tendency toward this goal” (1.80). Semantic clues, such as the “internally generated” elasticity, its act of “expression” in the contemplation of an exterior object, and the fact that it is a force that “tends toward” a particular goal, reinforce the idea of an originally interior state of the soul that strives towards and ultimately fails in a desired unity with something exterior to itself.

In the *Letter on Man and His Relations* (1772), Hemsterhuis expands upon the idea of the soul's elasticity, shifting his attention from the aesthetic context of an individual's appreciation of a work of art to the context of social relations. Just as one needs light and air to see and to hear, the heart and conscience are only “manifest” when humans are in social settings rather than alone: “It is then that passions and desires crowd in, that the soul acquires its elasticity, senses itself, loves itself, esteems itself, and recognizes its source” (1.104). In other words, Hemsterhuis believes that we only become cognizant of the fact that the soul possesses elasticity when we become aware that there are other expressions of volition (or, to use Hemsterhuis's term, other “velleities”) in our environment in addition to our own. For Hemsterhuis, such a plenitude of velleities, each desiring its own elastic expansion, connects to the Aristotelian idea of the “horror vacui,” and also to the physical idea of the elasticity of air that expands to fill any given space. So too does the soul, until it encounters resistance, just as air or light might meet a particular obstacle. The idea of the soul's elasticity is repeated in subsequent essays. *Simon* (1787), for example, also articulates this idea as an expression of order from chaos through the suggestion the soul determines itself from indeterminate velleity into particular acts of will (2.116).

At the same time, these scenarios where elasticity is formulated in terms of outwardly-directed metaphors of desire and volition which originate within the soul, compatible with the intuition of the elasticity of air, do not tell the whole story of his inventiveness with the metaphor of elasticity. Hemsterhuis also uses it as an instrument for philosophical reasoning in the *Letter on Man and His Relations* to articulate the transition from human capabilities (i.e., man as a “being who has the faculty of sensing, thinking, and reasoning”) to

a “man as an acting being” (1.94). He stages the transition with reference to the laws of physics, beginning with the idea of inertia encapsulated by Newton’s first law – that a body at rest will stay at rest, and a body in motion will stay in constant motion, unless acted on by a force. By analogy, the question of overcoming inertia raises the question of how bodies – specifically, human bodies – manage to move from states of rest to motion, or from uniform motion to accelerated motion, and leads Hemsterhuis to conclude that the soul, though distinct from the body, is its “motor principle” (1.94). The act of velleity is, in this framework, the formal expression of the soul’s desire to move the body. This idea is tested out a few pages later in the form of a thought experiment that connects the velleity of the soul directly to the elastic force of a spring.

Hemsterhuis sets up the thought experiment by first positing that velleity is the “necessary effect [=motive force] of a physical cause” (1.98). He then imagines a scenario where an “act of will wants to produce a physical effect,” and “this effect is to be the displacement of a weight of a hundred pounds” (1.98). The problem, however, is that one lacks the necessary physical strength and is only able to move a weight of fifty pounds. Hemsterhuis claims that there are three possible ways of envisioning an outcome to this situation: that the velleity will either “be annihilated, be negative, or continue” (1.98). He uses the mechanical spring as a metaphor to arrive at an answer:

one will say that the case I am supposing is exactly like that of a coil-spring. Without entering here into an inquiry into the nature of the coil-spring, although it would be infinitely curious, I answer that the means the act of will employs may in fact be like the case of the coil-spring, but not the act of will itself. Let us posit that a coil-spring with a force of fifty pounds acts against an obstacle of a hundred pounds, then it is true that the action of the coil-spring is neither destroyed nor negated but will continue permanently. And this coil-spring continues its action only in a uniform manner, that is, with the force of fifty pounds, just like the means the act of will employs that are just as powerful. Now if the act of will was a modification caused by the impulses of some parts of matter, one of three would have to be [the case], according to good physics: either that this act of will was negated, or that it was annihilated, or that its intensity remained the same in accordance with that of the means employed, that is, with the power of fifty pounds. But none of these happens in this case: the will carries on regardless and still wills to move one hundred pounds. (1.98)

The central problem of Hemsterhuis's thought experiment becomes clearer against the backdrop of a comparable model Kant used to illustrate the idea of "real contradictions" in an essay on negative magnitudes, published in 1763, some nine years before Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Man and His Relations*. In a "real contradiction," Kant writes, two predicates associated with a thing can exist in opposition to each other without invoking the law of contradiction. Kant provides the example of a ship at sea held motionless by two winds of equal strength that blow in opposing directions.⁸ The product of two canceling forces is still "something," however, and he qualifies that statement by adding that the "consequence of such an opposition is rest, which is something (*repraesentabile*)."⁹ "Rest," in the sense Kant uses it here, is one of the most common concepts of static mechanics and is used to describe a state where a body or system is in equilibrium due to a balance of forces.

When one considers Kant's image of the ship being held in place by two equal and oppositely-directed gales of wind alongside the stasis central to Hemsterhuis's image of a coil-spring pushing against a rock while being "motivated" by a velleity greater than the actual material strength, certain similarities and differences become apparent. From a purely physical point of view, there is the similarity that both cases exemplify static equilibrium. In the one case, two equal forces hold the boat in place, and in the other case, one also does not see any movement: in physical terms, the amount of force the coil-spring exerts on the rock is equal to the amount of force the rock exerts on the coil-spring. The extra fifty pounds the rock weighs does not factor into this scenario, except for the fact that it constitutes an immovable mass from the individual's point of view. From a different perspective, however, an important distinction arises. Kant's point is that the "positive" and "negative" forces cancel each other out in terms of effect, but they both still remain active and present. Hemsterhuis, for his part, couples a physical phenomenon with the metaphysical idea of volition. The velleity of the soul, even though it is expressed as the desire to move an object of one hundred pounds, remains a constant until the soul decides otherwise and is qualitatively different than any measurements of physical strength.

⁸ Iain Hamilton Grant remarks that "it is instructive that Kant's sailing ship example pitches logical contradiction against opposing *forces*, since this tallies with Fichte's practical-theoretical concept of *positing* as activity" (Grant 88). Grant connects the forces of real opposition to the striving of the I and not-I in Fichte's model: "The I's continuous forces and quanta of activity produce and form reality" (*ibid.*).

⁹ Kant, "Negative Magnitudes," 211.

These examples testify to Hemsterhuis's originality as well as to the degree he is willing to mine the potential of elasticity as a metaphor for the actions of the soul. Unlike contemporary thinkers who understand the activity of the "soul" entirely as a problem of the "body" (such as Diderot, for example), Hemsterhuis retains the idea of a soul even as he is interested in keeping mechanical phenomena as a reference point. These same examples also underscore the fact that there are limits to be respected when constructing physical and metaphysical comparisons – that the physical strength of a human body is certainly not the same as the metaphor of will informing a soul's desires although they exist in a relationship of instrumentality (just as Hemsterhuis is careful to distinguish between the "means" the act of will uses and the act of will itself).

With the introduction of the notion that the soul is not alone in its desires – that there are other desiring and acting souls in the world with velleities that might be directed in ways that compete with our own – Hemsterhuis raises the broader question of to what degree we are "active" as opposed to "reactive" individuals. Precisely the question of how it can be difficult to distinguish between action and reaction with metaphors of elasticity arises in Hemsterhuis's philosophical dialogue *Aristaeus* (1779). Aristaeus and Diocles begin the dialogue with a rumination on order and disorder, both from a cosmic perspective and from a personal one. At the same time, the question is also raised of what we are even able to comprehend with our limited human faculties. As the conversation shifts from the notion of a "relative" order innate to the person who perceives it, to the notion of a universal intelligence or "world soul," Aristaeus and Diocles stake out different claims. For Diocles, this shift amounts to a change in perspective from thinking about the universe as an assortment of physical phenomena towards thinking about the universe as intellectual. As Hemsterhuis shows, when one adopts the latter perspective, further adjustments in perception necessarily ensue: "images of relationships and relations between things are concentrated into or placed in the imagination of another Being; and this Being is endowed with a faculty called intellect" (2.76). Another consequence of adopting the notion of a world soul as a governing intellect is that matter is relegated into the category of the reactive: its "most incontestable essential property," according to Diocles, "is to react against all action" (2.77). He then introduces the term elasticity – "a rather vague word, and one which masks our ignorance in many cases" (2.77) as he admits – to stand in as an example that applies to a broad range of phenomena.

Diocles begins with a single image: an illustration of elasticity that refers to an uncompressed spring, one which can only be compressed "by the action

of an alien force” (2.77). The compression occurs in proportion to the “tenacity” of its material, and when the cause is removed, the spring returns to its original state (2.77). From this single image, Diocles arrives at a number of generalizations regarding both the cause of compression and the reaction of the spring. One is the claim that “what we call elasticity is but one and the same thing as inertia or that faculty of reaction” (2.77). Another is the cause which compresses the spring in the first place is more scientifically interesting than “[the cause] of the activity of the spring which is manifest in the reactivity of its inertia” (2.77), which leads to the claim that “this cause, taken in general, is the same as that which governs organization, the formation of substances, and the direction of planetary orbits” (2.77) and that it is the same force as that which “links dead and inert parts of matter, and forces them to live and to act, by way of the very principle of their own inactivity” (2.77-78).

The idea that the compression of a spring occurs “by the action of an alien force,” coupled with the notion that there is a universally active intellect – the world soul – that positions itself as the ultimate origin of all conceivable phenomena, raises questions which are, as Hemsterhuis himself intuits, not aided by the “rather vague” term elasticity. One question is how to interpret the motive quality of the soul in terms of action and reaction. Is it active, intruding as an external force onto the inertial frame of reference of the body, causing it to move – or to increase its rate of speed? Or is the human soul itself simply to be understood as reactive when it comes to the activity of the world soul? A second, equally pressing question has to do with the materiality of the metaphor. The coil-spring described in *Man and His Relations* and the compressed spring of *Aristaeus* each take advantage of an image that is quite easy to visualize: that of a metal spring that may be compressed or distended. But the same image does not quite fit with descriptions of an outwardly-oriented desire that streams constantly away from the hypothetical central point of the soul. The metaphorical connections Hemsterhuis engenders through his references to elasticity in those cases do not specifically mention materials such as light or air. But to a latter-day reader – and in particular, a reader grounded in German Romanticism and *Naturphilosophie* – these are precisely the models that best fit Hemsterhuis’s descriptions. To accept this distinction is to see in Hemsterhuis’s writing the nascence of two co-existing material metaphors of elasticity, each with their own language and parameters, and each with their unique ability to contribute to metaphysical speculations.

3. Elastic Speculations in Romanticism and *Naturphilosophie*

The first part of this essay showed how Hemsterhuis sets a precedent for later speculative thinking about elasticity by constructing philosophical scenarios that draw upon different physical phenomena grouped under the heading of elasticity. Hemsterhuis's use of the coil-spring as a metaphor has not escaped scholarly attention. In a recent essay on Hemsterhuis's reception in the German context, Gabriel Trop describes how the spring was a "basic figure" of the philosopher's thought, functionally equivalent to Goethe's 'primordial phenomenon': "by archetypally embodying and disclosing an ontological dynamic that subtends all individuated things" (Trop 36). As far as this description of a figure of elasticity goes, however, it perhaps does not go far enough. As the following pages will show, there is more to the idea of elasticity than can be captured by the metaphorical image of the coil-spring, and the aspects of elasticity compatible with light rather than solid metals, already suggested in Hemsterhuis's writings, have a more significant role to play around 1800. The present section will show how, around 1800, the philosophical discussions of elasticity are just as interested in metaphors of those elastic phenomena that involve the media of light or air -- where it is no simple matter of a material "deformation" and return. When Hemsterhuis's readers make the case that he is a "paradigmatic thinker" for the Romantics in various ways, they are usually thinking about these writers' use of moral and aesthetic categories rather than how they integrate scientific concepts into their work.¹⁰ The following pages will first take a broad look at how nature-philosophical writers such as Carl von Eschenmayer, Friedrich Schelling, and Johann Wilhelm Ritter construed elasticity beyond the coil-spring. These examples will set the stage for the concluding section of this essay, with its focus on how Novalis integrates various metaphors of elasticity within a single conceptual framework while also achieving a balance between the moral / aesthetic categories and scientific discourses.

Just as it is for Hemsterhuis, elasticity is directly related to forces of attraction and repulsion in Eschenmayer's 1797 *Sätze aus der Natur-Metaphysik auf chemische und medicinische Gegenstände angewandt* [Propositions from Nature-metaphysics Applied to Chemical and Medicinal Objects]. Like his contemporaries, such as Ritter, Eschenmayer imagines a spectrum of materials differentiated by their respective balance of attractive and repulsive forces. His speculative leap occurs when he transposes this spectrum of balanced forces into a relation whose terms are defined by elasticity (which for him is correlated to the force of repulsion) and mass (correlated to the

¹⁰ Trop, "Hemsterhuis as Provocation," 37.

force of attraction): “Thus a material of single mass and double elasticity would maintain equilibrium with a material of doubled mass and single elasticity” (*Propositions* 24). He then makes his comparison more explicit: “Since elasticity behaves precisely as velocity did in the above proposition, from which the law of the lever was derived, both of them must therefore be able to be returned to one another, and to deliver the same results in their application to mechanical or dynamic quantities” (*Propositions* 25). To drive the point home, Eschenmayer introduces the example of water temperature. “Every temperature of water between its boiling point and freezing point can be understood as having emerged from two different temperatures, of which the one is larger, the other smaller, than the middle temperature” (*Propositions* 25). Because every temperature can be understood as a composite of the weight of the water and the “degree of elasticity of the warmth,” it can therefore, “according to the analogy with the lever, be called a quantity of motion, and the middle temperature can be seen as a common hypomochlion, against which two such quantities of motion are working” (*Propositions* 25). If one recollects the proposition associated with the mechanical lever that says in the case of equal weights and velocities that the distance from the fulcrum point must also be the same, then, Eschenmayer argues, it must also be true that in the case of equal masses of water, the negative and positive degrees of elasticity are also in equilibrium: “thus the mechanical law of the lever can be applied precisely to dynamic quantities” (*Sätze* 26). Eschenmayer does not clearly explain what the “elasticity” of warmth is in physical terms. As it was for Diocles, here too elasticity is “a rather vague word.” Eschenmayer certainly exploits elasticity’s terminological vagueness, however, because it allows him to create relations of balance and proportion among a number of different concepts – such is the intellectual exercise of the *Sätze* in regimes ranging from chemistry to physics to the mind.

In contrast to Eschenmayer, Friedrich Schelling’s interest in elasticity is focused much more on light, considered the least material of substances. This is evident in two of his key nature-philosophical treatises published contemporaneously to Novalis’s own philosophical work: the *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797) and *Von der Weltseele* (1798). In each case, when the phenomenon of elasticity is connected to an analysis of light, it is generally understood as a tendency to expand in space unless resistance is encountered. In the *Ideen*, Schelling conceives of light’s elasticity by setting it in an analogical relationship to air:

in physics it is advantageous to make reference to analogies. Thus the elasticity of air is proportional to the pressure (the resistance) it suffers.

Air would stop being elastic as soon as it encounters no resistance, that is, as soon as it expanded infinitely. Based on this analogy, light can only be elastic insofar as it encounters *resistance* (Schelling, *Ideen*, 127)

This analogy exhibits a kind of parallelism with its own subject matter: like air, since the analogy encounters no hypothetical resistance, it extends even further. When we pursue the analogy, claims Schelling, we can come to know something about elasticity: that it is only possible between two extremes (which themselves are never found in nature), understood as “infinite expansion” on the one end and infinite compression on the other. The physical image informing this analogy is demanding for any reader who tries to share Schelling’s spatial intuition: the mind is invited to imagine an elastic movement from a point in space to the unimaginable extent (volume) of the universe. Another physical phenomenon will eventually connect to this line of thought: Schelling engages in further analogical thinking in the chapter on electricity, where, based on the examples of the elasticity of light, he arrives at the idea that everything that either promotes or hinders elasticity seems to do the same for electricity (*Ideen* 149). An actual definition, equating elasticity with “the force of repulsion of bodies, insofar as it has its *determined* degree,” is only introduced at a later point in the treatise (*Ideen* 222).

Schelling’s reflection on the elasticity of light in the *Weltseele* treatise, published one year after the *Ideen*, uses a slightly different conceptual apparatus. In Part One of the treatise, “On the First Force of Nature,” light is considered for its quality as the finest fathomable material, and not as an analogy to air: “The matter that in every system radiates from the center to the periphery – light – moves with such force and velocity that some have even doubted its materiality” (Grant translation, 74). And even though the image Schelling conjures seems a far cry from more conventional models of an equilibrium of forces, such as one would find on a weighted balance, Schelling assures his readers that the difference is only one of degree. Equilibrium will always be reached, eventually, because there is no infinite space for light to stream into. This is not Schelling’s final word, however: his aim in this passage is for readers to understand light as something “complex” or “composed” (*zusammengesetzt*), much as a point on the arm of the balance correlates to a tension of opposing forces. The purpose of this passage in the *World Soul* can therefore be read as a thought experiment geared towards pushing the concept of static equilibrium to a material limit by imagining a scenario where it applies to what was believed to be the least dense material of all substances. By contrast, the standard examples, such as that of a balance held motionless by two weights at distances from the fulcrum point

that the mechanical moments are equal, do not require any concept of elasticity at all for Schelling. In the case of light, however, it becomes indispensable.

We will consider *light* not as a simple element, but rather as the product of two matters, one of which, as elastic as light, can be called the *positive* matter of light...and the other, less elastic by nature, the *negative* (ponderable) matter of light.

The positive matter of light is, in relation to light, the ultimate ground of its susceptibility to expansion and to *that extent*, absolutely classic, although we cannot at all think it *as* matter without considering even *its* elasticity in turn as finite, that is, as itself *composite*.

(*World Soul*, Grant translation, 79)

Schelling's image of light's elastic expansion is one of bounded unboundedness – the reader is challenged, conceptually, to create a framework or scale whose endpoints exceed the unbounded phenomenon itself. Unlike Hemsterhuis, for whom the elasticity of the soul's velleity was also eagerly expanding to fill the vacuum around it, before coming into contact with other velleities with the same goal in mind, Schelling's image contains no agency to anchor it.

Schelling's contemporary, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, found himself confronted with a similar challenge, which he framed in a much different way. In Fragment #111, from the collection titled *Fragments from the Estate of a Young Physicist* (1810), he uses elasticity analogously to Eschenmayer, as a way of visualizing the scale of chemical affinities by conjuring a scenario in which a fluid dissolves a gas (“or has [the] gas dissolved within itself”). In this scenario – a common one for chemical reactions in the laboratory – the fluid, according to Ritter “does the same thing which an infinite pressure would do.” At the same time, from the gas's perspective, there occurs the removal of its chemical “cohesion” (what we would today describe as a breaking down of chemical bonds). The water thereby “removes” all elasticity from the gas, through a finite pressure applied “equally in *every* point of the gas. This leads Ritter to the following chiasmic statements:

Infinite pressure on finite surface = finite pressure on infinite surface

Infinite antipressure in finite surface = finite antipressure in infinite surface

(Fragment #111)

His conclusion is that all values that fall within the notion of “finitude” – values that denote the finite pressure and antipressure – correlate to a particular chemical affinity. Compared to Schelling’s attempts to frame the equilibrium of expanding light, one can see that Ritter also conceives of elasticity as a physical phenomenon on a scale between two extremes not found in nature. Whereas Schelling points towards the infinite, Ritter attempts to bind it chiasmatically, but in each case, elasticity acts as the conceptual instrument to facilitate thinking beyond what is possible.

4. Novalis, Synthesis

In the work of Novalis, the various strands of “elastic” thinking that have been in play since Hemsterhuis – elasticity as the expression of desire and other states of mind, and its distinct usage when connected to metaphors of coil springs and “elastic light” – come together.¹¹ In the key novel of Early German Romanticism, Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the elasticity of light appears as a metaphor that structures an analogy between the way our outwardly-reaching mind (*Gemüth*) encounters nature and the refraction of light on a solid body: “[a body] holds [light] back; it breaks it into proper [*eigenthümliche*] colors; it ignites a light on its surface or within it” (I.281). The elasticity of light, ceaselessly expansive, is something to strive for, and to imitate: “the true mind [of the poet] is like light, just as calm and sensitive, just as elastic and penetrating, just as powerful and just as unobtrusively effective as this delectable element” (I.281). What for Schelling was at the limit of the conceivable becomes for Novalis an instrument of poetic technique. Rather than being overwhelmed by what appears to be a potentially infinite expansion, one should strive to imitate it.

A note from the *General Brouillon* operates in the same vein with an observation couched in an ambivalent syntax: “Ächte Unschuld – ist absolute *Elasticität* – nicht zu überwältigen” [genuine innocence – is absolute *elasticity* – not to overpower] (III.273.188). The actual confusion lies in whether innocence and elasticity both occupy the subject position, or whether they

¹¹ Dalia Nassar has called attention to the pivotal role Hemsterhuis played for Novalis’s thinking about morality through an analysis of the notes collected under the heading of “Hemsterhuis-Studien” in the Novalis critical edition. The present essay’s focus on elasticity as a guiding concept does not naturally lead to that part of Novalis’s writing, but Nassar’s claims that “in his notes on Hemsterhuis ... Novalis introduces the idea of an organized body of knowledge that seeks to overcome the divisions of the disciplines” and that it is in the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* that Novalis “begins to develop a conception of the organic, which reappears throughout his work”, and can serve as solid reminders as to the extent of Novalis’s intellectual engagement with Hemsterhuis (Nassar 40).

are split here into a subject-object relationship, but more important for the present discussion is the fact that Novalis's notes accumulate an array of psychic phenomena where elasticity is allowed to operate as a metaphor. In addition to innocence, for example, there is another worthy quality: patience, in the sense of the acquiescent sufferance of a lack or of an excess. In a note framed under the heading "psychology" dating from September through October of 1798, Novalis writes that "True patience testifies to great *elasticity*" (III.291.289).

Novalis's scientific notes on elasticity group it with concepts he deems to be related: "coherence, density, absolute gravity, specific gravity, and hardness" (III.52). These are all-purpose concepts which could lend themselves to describe phenomena in various physical and chemical experimental contexts. Another note grouped under the heading, *Großes Physikalisches Studienheft*, however, takes up the idea of elasticity in the context of electrical conduction: "To arm [*armiren*] means ... to bring into contact with a specifically elastic body" (III.55). Rather than finding ourselves in a physical environment where light or air is ceaselessly expanding, Novalis integrates the notion of constant movement in a different way, by granting the elastic body the function of medium through its ability to conduct electricity. Novalis continues in the same fragment by structuring a parallel between elasticity and conductivity, where "incomplete" conductors and non-conductors are incomplete specifically elastic¹² bodies, and a "complete" elastic conductor is a complete conductor *and* a complete nonconductor at the same time. Elasticity, he concludes, is therefore "*relative* Capacity and excitability [*Erregbarkeit*]," which leads him to the blanket statement: "Everything synthetic is *elastic* – more or less. Complete synthesis – complete elasticity" (III.55). The term "synthetic" underscores the fact that the concept of elasticity, for Novalis, exists in a relation of two discrete qualities to one another, rather than in an isolated state.

Novalis's most illuminating statement on elasticity is also the one with the greatest claims to universality, beginning with the phrase "there are several kinds of *unknowns*" and ending with the question "what is a *phenomenon*?" (III.403.703). These open-ended lines of philosophical questioning frame a cluster of further concepts. Subject, object, space, time, sickness,

¹² Gehler's *Physical Dictionary* defines specific elasticity as follows:

"Through this word, one expresses the relation between absolute elasticity and density [*Dichtigkeit*] of the elastic material, so that one attributes to the material a *greater* specific elasticity if it presses by the same density *more strongly*, and attributes to the material a *lesser* specific elasticity if it presses by the same density *less*. ... This word thereby expresses a relative concept, just like the word thickness itself." (vol. 1,711-2).

soul – they all have a role to play. It is the concept of elasticity, however, that facilitates the desired connection. Here is the note in its entirety:

There are various kinds of *unknowns*. / Subj[ect] and Obj[ect] is as much as sense [*Sinn*] in general and object [*Gegenstand*] – or stimulus [*Reitz*]. A constant change is a temporal change. Emergence of times – from the relative, and thus gradually decreasing elasticity of our thought-action. Spaces and times are symptoms of weakness. / Every true sickness is *fever – broken health* – (see colors.) Exchange of a pos[itive] and neg[ative] condition of health.

(Application of the concepts of *elasticity*, brittleness – softness – hardening etc. to the body etc. and the explanation of its phenomena. The soul = *spring* [Feder] = maximum of the spring effect – *pushing over* [*übertreiben*] – *driving under* [*untertreiben*].

(Mixture of chemical and mechanical elasticity.)

The external is as it were only a partially translated inside – a *higher* inside. (What is *phenomenon*?) (III.403.703)

The first sentences are not joined by any particular sequential logic but, taken together, they establish conditions for spatial and temporal coordinates: the existence of multiple objects in space, and the perception of their duration framed as change over time. As indicated by the opposition of subject and object, the initial discursive context of this note is psychological, the realm of thought-actions. Novalis situates the “emergence of times” in proportion to a loss of elasticity in our thinking. It is not surprising, then, that he diagnoses the loss of cognitive elasticity as a kind of pathology, based on the claim that the manifestation in spaces and times are symptoms of weakness. Imagining the condition whereby one would possess a perfectly elastic “thought-action” – such as Klingsohr describes the mind of the poet in Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* – could help, however, because in such an imagined state of mind where the action of thinking is immeasurably fast, faster than any physical phenomenon, thinking becomes perfectly expansive. As it accumulates references to pathologies – in the form of “sickness,” “weakness,” and “broken health,” as they are accompanied by their physical counterparts of “brittleness” and “hardening” – the note then incorporates the more materially dense metaphor of the coil spring, allowing the two dominant metaphors of elasticity we have been working with all along, that of the elasticity of light and of the coil-spring, an uneasy cohabitation in the fragile house of the body. It is from within the framework of the body that the mind can practice its elastic expansions, that the soul can assume its spring-like operations, and

that the surrounding parts can also come together in varying degrees of material elasticity, some brittle, others pliable. In this model, constructed as it has been with the help of what has been decried as a vague and poorly understood term, the concept of elasticity finds a home, as it were.¹³ The body as articulated in Novalis is not just the physical container of velleity in Hemsterhuis's sense of the word, but an amalgam of qualitatively and quantitatively different phenomena, an architectural structure whose pliable joints reveal elastic resilience.

The Romantic-era coupling of two models of elasticity – one in the easily visualizable form of the coil-spring and the other in the more challenging idea of an “elastically” expanding light that seems to exist at the border of materiality – proves with hindsight to be a fleeting constellation. The scientific discourse on light shifts precipitously throughout the next decades. Already prior to the eighteenth century, the argument about whether light is best understood as a particle or as a wave had emerged, with Newton and Huygens at the forefront. At the very beginning of the nineteenth century, Thomas Young's 1803 address to the Royal Society detailed experiments, published one year later in the paper *Experiments and Calculations Relative to Physical Optics*, that he took as proof that light is best understood as a wave rather than as a particle. Subsequent theories and experiments by Maxwell, Einstein, and others create a more complicated picture: from today's perspective, light is considered to be comprised of particles, photons, which have no mass.

The notion of light's “elasticity” fell by the wayside in the course of the nineteenth century. From the perspective of a philosophical narrative reaching from Hemsterhuis to the Romantic era, however, it had already served its usefulness as a metaphorical counterpart to the elastic coil-spring. The “looseness” of elasticity, in terms of which phenomena it encompasses and the language one uses to express it -- offers a flexible way of relating Hemsterhuis to Novalis and the nature-philosophical tradition without having to define the relationship in terms of a reception history. What for Hemsterhuis is an openness to testing out various aspects of elasticity through extended metaphors and thought experiments manifests in Novalis as a desire to synthesize the various metaphorical manifestations of elasticity.

¹³ As Gabriel Trop has shown, Hemsterhuis “insists on a stark distinction between body and soul,” but still “explores conceptual operations – specifically those attributed to the figure of the organ – that integrate these two differentiated domains into an overarching functional framework and bring them a zone of commensurability with one another” (Trop, 37). In the note from Novalis, one can see the concept of elasticity, within the general framework of the body, taking a similarly mediating position.

With reference to Hemsterhuis and Novalis, as well as to Novalis's nature-philosophical contemporaries, one can therefore speak of a shared affinity for elastic metaphors that use late-eighteenth-century scientific understandings of elasticity as a focus through which more familiar concepts such as desire and aesthetic appreciation are channeled, and one can also see how elasticity becomes a reference point for a broad array of phenomena that fall under the rubric of Romantic-era polarities.

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Mathesis universalis moralis

Hemsterhuis's Moral Organ in Novalis's Philosophy of Science

*Santiago J. Napoli**

ABSTRACT

This article explores the role played by the moral philosophy of Frans Hemsterhuis in Novalis's views on the connection between science and morality. It shows in particular how certain concepts from the Dutch philosopher's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* (1772) underlie the most important theoretical work of the Novalisian corpus: *Das allgemeine Brouillon. Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik* (1798-1799). This posthumously published text posits an original conception of science developed by means of the concept of "encyclopedistics" (*Enzyklopädistik*). To accomplish this objective, the present article examines Novalis's earlier notes titled *Hemsterhuis-Studien* (1797) in conjunction with *Das allgemeine Brouillon* from the standpoint of two epistemological problems that encyclopedistics tries to solve through morality: the separation of the sciences and the lack of dynamism within scientific practice.

Keywords: science, morality, epistemology, encyclopedistics, organ

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore le rôle joué par la philosophie morale de François Hemsterhuis dans les vues de Novalis sur le lien entre science et moralité. On montre en particulier que certains concepts de la *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* (1772) du philosophe néerlandais sous-tendent l'œuvre théorique la plus importante du corpus novalissien : *Das allgemeine Brouillon. Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik* (1798-1799). Ce texte, publié à titre posthume, développe une conception originale de la science à partir du concept d'« encyclopédistique » (*Enzyklopädistik*). Pour établir l'influence des conceptions morales de Hemsterhuis sur le projet novalissien, le présent article examine conjointement le texte du *Brouillon général* et les notes connues sous le titre *Hemsterhuis-Studien* (1797), qui lui sont antérieures, à la lumière de deux problèmes épistémologiques que l'encyclopédistique tente de résoudre par la morale : la séparation des sciences et le défaut de dynamisme qui caractérise la pratique scientifique.

Mots-clés : science, moralité, épistémologie, encyclopédistique, organe

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Not only within an academic setting, but also in political, corporate, artistic, or religious environments, and even in everyday conversation, the question is often raised: how is science related to morality? The most common answers redirect us to mainstream philosophy, to different hypotheses about the human condition or, at best, to the existing situation and historical background of science and its moral function. All these aspects lead us to another popular question: should science even be moral?

If currently the intention is to answer immediately, *a fortiori*, if we identify ourselves as researchers in the social sciences and humanities, we would have to enthusiastically respond in the affirmative. Several moral instruments can be identified in the world of science, such as codes of ethics or specific procedures for conducting research ethically, especially in the natural sciences. More specifically, we could speak, for instance, about successful cases in which animals remain unharmed during experiments, or perhaps about the full copyright that authors should ideally acquire in exchange for the articles they publish.

If the first of these questions about the relation between morality and science were put to one of the most important philosophers of German Romanticism, however, he would probably give a completely different type of answer. Novalis, whose birth name was Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772-1801), states in one of his theoretical works:

THEORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE. Nature will become moral. We are her *educators* — her moral *tangents*—her moral stimuli. Can morality, like the intellect etc., be objectified, and organized? — *Visible morality* (...)

Can chemistry become art? Decisive question. It will become so through morality.¹

Here Novalis certainly indicates a different mode of morality in comparison to the most popular concept of morality today, especially if we consider the above examples of moral codes of conduct or behavioral directives in research

¹ 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), 12-13. The original text in German can be found in Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Dritter Band. Das philosophische Werk II* (henceforth referred to as HKA III), eds. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983), 252-253. We will use Wood's translation in the case of *Das allgemeine Brouillon. Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik*. All other translations from Novalis and from the German are our own.

ethics.² Although we have not yet further clarified Novalis’s idea of morality, the meaning he attributes to it in relation to nature, art, science, or knowledge in general, already seems to differ from its most common definition.

The above-quoted statements belong to entries 73 and 77 from Hardenberg’s posthumously published work entitled *Das allgemeine Brouillon. Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik* (1798–1799), an epistemological project that aimed to connect, combine, classify, and raise to a higher power not only science, but knowledge as such. The fundamental concept that Novalis creates and deploys throughout the *Brouillon* is “encyclopedistics” (*Enzyklopädistik*).³

Among the numerous sources of Hardenberg’s *Brouillon*, we find an author named Frans Hemsterhuis (1721–1790). In a treatise entitled *Lettre sur l’homme et ses rapports* (1772), this philosopher maintains that:

² Note that all these references relate to the popular concept of scientific morality, which is not to be strictly associated with the more complex and valuable developments in bioethics in the 20th and 21st centuries.

³ Although it is not precisely the main subject of this article, Novalis’s encyclopedistics is relevant to it, mainly because the philosophy of science within *Das allgemeine Brouillon* is inherently connected to this concept. In entry 233, Hardenberg perhaps writes his closest definition of “encyclopedistics”, while describing his everyday tasks: “One hour of encyclopedistics in general. This includes scientific algebra — equations. Relationships — similarities — equalities — effects of the sciences on each other”. Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 34 (HKA III, 280). Moreover, he uses the title *ENC[YKLOPAEDISTIK]* more than any other rubric when classifying roughly half of the 1151 entries of his *Brouillon* with thematic tags. Hardenberg sometimes associates encyclopedistics with a creative combinatorial use of the sciences, but in fact he also uses a wide range of methodological operations that concern the natural sciences, mathematics, philosophy, and even literary theory. A good account of these different uses can be found in Laure Cahen-Maurel, “Vers une ‘science totale’: l’encyclopédistique vivante de Novalis”, *Klesis* 42 (2018): 86–104, as well as in Franziska Bomski, *Die Mathematik im Denken und Dichten von Novalis. Zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Wissen um 1800* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 61–146.

Note that the aforementioned definition by Novalis does not have much in common with the historical concept of encyclopedistics applied to the paradigm of erudition between 1500 and 1750, which is commonly related to the storage, distribution, gathering, presentation, and classification of knowledge. For further details about the general concept of encyclopedistics, see Dirk Werle, “Zum Verhältnis von Skeptizismus und Enzyklopädistik bei Gabriel Naudé und Pierre Bayle”, in *Unsicheres Wissen. Skeptizismus Und Wahrscheinlichkeit 1550–1850*, eds. Carlos Spoerhase, Dirk Werle, and Markus Wild (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2009), 180–182, as well as Martin Schierbaum et al. *Enzyklopädistik 1550–1650*, ed. Martin Schierbaum (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009), XII–XIX.

the greatest happiness to which it seems that man can aspire at all times resides in the increase of perfection or sensibility of the moral organ, which will increase his joys and bring him closer to God.⁴

In this case, we feel compelled to ask: can this view of “the sensibility of the moral organ” help clarify Novalis’s idea of the moralization of nature through science? The aim of this article is to answer that question. In fact, it seeks to more precisely determine how Hemsterhuis’s moral philosophy plays a highly significant role in Novalis’s epistemology.⁵

The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to explore Hemsterhuis’s impact on Novalis’s conception of science as intrinsically linked to morality.⁶ Accordingly, it intends to demonstrate how Novalis’ encyclopedistics, following Hemsterhuis’s moral philosophy, can be understood as a true *mathesis universalis moralis*. This expression essentially defines the Novalisian

⁴ François Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Jacob van Sluis (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 154. Translations from Hemsterhuis are nearly always from the recent English translation of Hemsterhuis’s early works, published in January 2022: François Hemsterhuis, *The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis (1762-1773)*, eds. Jacob Van Sluis and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 2 vols. (Henceforth EE). Here vol. 1, p. 112.

⁵ Throughout this article, we intentionally use “epistemology” ambiguously. On the one hand, we employ it in its broadest, common sense, which relates to knowledge in general, its limits or its origin, among other philosophical problems. On the other hand, we make use of “epistemology” *strictu sensu*, namely regarding science or scientific knowledge. In this case, the word becomes a synonym of “philosophy of science”. This particular employment derives from the etymological roots of the word ἐπιστήμη, which denotes indistinctly “knowledge” and “science”, and it also derives from its stricter meaning in other languages, such as French or Spanish.

⁶ The strong impact of Hemsterhuis’s concept of morality on Novalis’s vision of science as a whole, a subject that roughly constitutes the main thesis of this article, was firstly addressed by Hans-Joachim Mähl in 1965: “Die Frühzeit Hardenbergs und die Auseinandersetzung mit Hemsterhuis und Fichte”, in *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* (Berlin-Boston: Max Niemeyer, reprint 2012), 255-304. By considering Hemsterhuis’s essays, Mähl discovers not only one fundamental philosophical source of Novalis, but he also opens up a new field of studies regarding the reception of the political and moral ideas of the Dutch philosopher in Early German Romanticism. We also take into account some of the most recent and relevant approaches to this subject, such as the chapter in Giampiero Moretti’s detailed book on Novalis’s philosophy and poetry: “Le *Hemsterhuis-Studien* e il loro ruolo nello sviluppo dell’estetica novalisiana. Il ‘superamento’ di Fichte”, in *Novalis. Pensiero, poesia, romanzo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2016), 66-81. In addition, Moretti’s book is the only Italian work that so far approaches Novalis’s thought as a whole. We also stress the importance of Dalia Nassar’s book chapter: “Beyond the Subjective Self: Hemsterhuis, Kant, and the Question of the Whole”, in *The Romantic Absolute. Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795- 1804* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013), 39-47 (especially 39-44), and more specifically, the earlier article by Laure Cahen-Maurel: “Vers une ‘science totale’: l’encyclopédistique vivante de Novalis”, *Klesis* 42 (2018): 79–109.

search for the unity of all knowledge. Consequently, Novalis's project attempts to resolve two problems that are still current in the philosophy of science: the overspecialization and separation of disciplines, and the lack of dynamism within scientific practice.

This article is divided in four sections. One (1), explores the study and reception of Hemsterhuis's thought throughout the course of Novalis' biography, which appears in his philosophical and literary works, not to mention in other historical documents, such as his correspondence. Two (2), briefly examines the epistemology and moral philosophy in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* in order to present the basic concepts that Novalis utilizes in his *Brouillon*. Three (3), tries to reconstruct the Hemsterhuisian heritage in Novalis's epistemology by detailing how encyclopedistics aspires to unify all the sciences by presenting solutions to the first of the above two listed philosophical problems, regarding the overspecialization and separation of disciplines. Four (4), shows in what manner Novalis intends to enhance scientific discovery from the standpoint of the moralization of science, an aspect that directly links his project with the moral philosophy of Hemsterhuis. Here Novalis tries to solve the second of the above-mentioned philosophical problems regarding the lack of dynamism within scientific practice.

Throughout sections (3) and (4), tables will be occasionally used that reproduce entries from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* (1798-1799), to compare them with Novalis's other notes called the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* (1797) and with Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* (1772). Such an approach better highlights the way in which Hardenberg re-reads his earlier studies on Hemsterhuisian philosophy in order to develop a more complete theory of the sciences that becomes strongly underpinned by an original concept of morality.

1. A Philosophical Companion

In January 1792, Friedrich Schlegel tells his brother August Wilhelm that "fate has placed into my hands a young man who is capable of everything." Some lines after that, he describes this young man, not only physically, but also by underscoring his philosophical interests:

A very young man – of good, slim shape, very fine face with black eyes, of splendid expression when he speaks about something beautiful with fire – indescribable much fire – he speaks three times more and three times faster than the rest of us – the fastest capacity and sensibility. The study of philosophy has given him the wonderful

ability to build beautiful philosophical thoughts – he does not aim at the true, but the beautiful – his favourite authors are Plato and Hemsterhuys – with wildfire, he expressed one of the first evenings his opinion – that there would not be anything evil in the world – and that everything is again approaching to the golden age.⁷

At that time, Friedrich Schlegel barely knew Novalis. They had probably spent only a couple of evenings together. But those moments were of sufficient duration for Hardenberg to reveal one of his favorite thinkers: “Hemsterhuys”. Novalis seems to be aware of some theory of evil expounded by the Dutch philosopher as well as his conception of a future golden age. However, it is plausible that Novalis was unaware of the finer details of Hemsterhuis’s thought – given that he probably acquired his philosophical works only later that same year.⁸

Hemsterhuis was not unknown in the world of Early German Romanticism. He received a substantial amount of attention, mostly in Jena and Tübingen. We find the reception of his thoughts within certain philosophy hubs, in authors such as Hölderlin, Johann Gottfried Herder, Caroline Herder, M^{me} de Staël, and Friedrich Schlegel (possibly through Novalis).⁹ The Dutch philosopher was mainly associated with Neoplatonism, but with an eclectic form of it, since he was equally strongly influenced by modern physicists and philosophers from the Scottish school, like Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Ferguson.¹⁰

⁷ Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Vierter Band. Lebensdokumente* (henceforth HKA IV), ed. by Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl, and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart - Berlin - Köln: Kohlhammer, 1998), 571–72.

⁸ Throughout the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* and *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, Novalis uses the following French edition of Hemsterhuis’s philosophical works: François Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques de M. F. Hemsterhuis* (Paris: L’Imprimerie de H. J. Jansen, 1792). This means that he probably had not read the translation of Christian Friedrich von Blanckenburg, contrary to many of his colleagues and friends. For further information about Novalis’s biographical events regarding Hemsterhuis, such as the acquisition of his oeuvre or the impressions shared within the romantic circle, see Hans-Joachim Mähl’s introduction to *Hemsterhuis-Studien*: “Einleitung von Hans-Joachim Mähl”, in HKA III, 299–345.

⁹ For further details about the reading of Hemsterhuis by the German romanticists, see Michael Franz, *Schellings Tübingen Platon-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 76–81.

¹⁰ See Ursula Flickenschild, *Novalis’ Begegnung mit Fichte und Hemsterhuis*, ed. by Jacob van Sluis, *Hemsterhuisiana* Vol. 13 (Berltsum, 2010), 21–53. Flickenschild outlines the main themes of Hemsterhuisian philosophy: “the unity, the primary and love as (...) a return to the original oneness with all” (29). These subjects account for Hemsterhuis’s affinity with some of Plotinus’s most popular concepts, such as the *regressus* or metaphysical movement back to the One.

German Idealism and Romanticism likewise linked Hemsterhuis to the various discussions around Spinozism, especially because of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's role in distributing, characterizing, interpreting, and dialoguing with the Dutch philosopher.¹¹ Jacobi found Hemsterhuis's way of thinking, along with that of Kant, to be helpful disputing the Berlin Enlightenment and its unrestrictive utilization of reason.¹²

Contrary to what Friedrich Schlegel's 1792 letter suggests, Novalis's biographical documents do not furnish any proof of having read Hemsterhuis's works before 1797.¹³ In fact, the first text mentioning the Dutch philosopher is a detailed series of annotations on his thought: the *Hemsterhuis-Studien*, which was most probably written before the 30th of November 1797. This can be inferred from the letter Novalis sent to August Wilhelm Schlegel that same day:

Only now have I been able to separate myself from Hemsterhuis – so far, even my trip has been delayed. I leave here tomorrow, and go straight to Freiberg. I'll be in Dresden, I think, for Christmas. I have written to Berlin. Now that I am settled, I hope to write more assiduously to Berlin and Jena.¹⁴

In the letter, Novalis reveals an engagement with Hemsterhuis's philosophy, and how difficult it was for him to separate himself from the Dutch philosopher's texts. In addition to the *Kant und Eschenmeyer-Studien* and the *Fichte-*

¹¹ Daniel Whistler gives a detailed account of Hemsterhuis's reception in the life and thought of Jacobi. He essentially shows how Jacobi found a philosophical partner in Hemsterhuis, and how the Dutch philosopher plays a threefold role for the German thinker: as trigger, as character, and as author. Daniel Whistler, "Jacobi and Hemsterhuis", in *Friedrich Jacobi and the Ends of the Enlightenment: Philosophy and Religion at the Crux of Modernity*, ed. by Alexander J. B. Hampton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

¹² For further details on Jacobi's use of Hemsterhuis against the Berlin Enlightenment, see Maria Jimena Solé, *Recepción, interpretación e influencia de Spinoza en Alemania durante el siglo XVIII. Historia de la santificación de un filósofo maldito* (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2010), 192–217.

¹³ Despite the lack of documentary evidence, it is still possible that Novalis was already quite aware of Hemsterhuis's philosophical concepts, and could even have read some of his writings, especially considering his thought had been disseminated in the German-speaking world through the early translations of Herder (*Lettre sur les Désirs*, 1781) and Jacobi (*Alexis ou de l'âge d'or*, 1787). According to H. J. Balmes's commentary in the Hanser edition of Novalis's writings, these translations, along with the 1782 edition entitled *Vermischten philosophischen Schriften des H. Hemsterhuis*, would have opened the path to the intensive reading of Hemsterhuis within the Romantic circle. See Hans Jürgen Balmes, "Kommentar zu Hemsterhuis und Kant- Studien" in Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Dritter Band. Kommentar von Hans Jürgen Balmes*, eds. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Passau: Carl Hanser, 1987), 316.

¹⁴ HKA IV, 237.

Exzerpte, the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* were also written in 1797. These series of notes on different authors are emblematic examples of Hardenberg's return to his philosophical studies after the death of his fiancée Sophie von Kühn in March of the same year.

In particular, most of the notes in the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* refer to the famous *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, to which Novalis pays special attention, especially regarding the unique concept of "moral organ" (*organe moral*) and its anthropological and epistemological implications. To a lesser extent, he takes notes on *Alexis ou l'âge d'or* and *Lettre de Dioclès à Diotim sur l'Athéisme*, sometimes merely copying Hemsterhuis's words, and sometimes interpreting them more freely.

Various themes, including love, morality, science, religion, human nature, and perfectibility, which are all deeply related to Hemsterhuisian philosophy, are discussed and examined at length in Novalis's *Hemsterhuis-Studien*. After a brief reappearance in the fragments of *Blüthenstaub / Vermischte Bemerkungen* (1798)¹⁵, Hemsterhuis again receives full attention from a different perspective in *Das allgemeine Brouillon. Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik* (1798-1799), where Novalis tries to conceive an original system that can be useful for all possible knowledge: encyclopedistics.

In the *Brouillon*, Hardenberg refines his earlier remarks on Hemsterhuis, illustrating how the Dutch philosopher's thought tends towards a new epistemological conception capable of encompassing all the sciences and even all knowledge. Entries 196-201 of Novalis's work clearly account for a detailed re-reading of his own *Hemsterhuis-Studien*.¹⁶ Moreover, it can be assumed that Hemsterhuis appears in many other *Brouillon* notes that indirectly refer to his thinking, especially his ethics and philosophy of science.

In contrast, the notes written from 1799 to 1801, after his research on encyclopedistics, do not seem to consider Hemsterhuisian philosophy as a significant theme. However, many oblique references continue to appear in

¹⁵ In fragment 106, Novalis describes Hemsterhuis as a lyric philosopher: "Hemsterhuis is very often a logical Homerida" Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Zweiter Band. Das Philosophische Werk I* (henceforth HKA II), eds. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl, and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1981), 463.

His own *Hemsterhuis-Studien* also inspire fragment 6 of *Blüthenstaub / Vermischte Bemerkungen*: "Never will we fully comprehend ourselves, but we will and can do much more than comprehend ourselves" (HKA II, 413). Respectively, note 22 from the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* affirms: "Accordingly, man feels *passive* only at the level of mere judgement. We will never *fully* comprehend ourselves – but we will and can do *much more* than comprehend ourselves" (HKA II, 363).

¹⁶ HKA III, 275-276.

Novalis' literary works.¹⁷ That is not uncommon with respect to Hardenberg's prose and poetry, since his philosophical and especially his scientific background frequently manifest themselves from his early poetry to his late novels.¹⁸

Amidst this intellectual relationship between Hemsterhuis and Novalis: what is it that leads us to suggest a strong connection between these authors, especially regarding morality and science? I would argue that this link is mostly rooted in the *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, firstly because Hemsterhuis outlines an original conception of science and morality throughout this essay; and secondly because it is the philosophical oeuvre that Novalis excavates to best articulate his own scientific-moral project of encyclopedistics.¹⁹

2. Morality and Science in Hemsterhuis' *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*

Originally published in 1772 in French, the *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* was read and interpreted throughout Europe. Diderot, Herder, Jacobi, Goethe, Hamann, among other thinkers, all studied this text. Although it is

¹⁷ For instance, Novalis' biography by Gerhard Schulz analyzes in detail how the theoretical reception of Hemsterhuisian thought operates in the poem *An Tieck*, where Hardenberg describes the growth of a child's "inner sense" (*innrer Sinn*). See Gerhard Schulz, *Novalis. Leben und Werk Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (München: C.H. Beck, 2011), 210; 220–31.

¹⁸ For a few examples of this link between poetry and science, see Jocelyn Holland's chapter devoted to the discourse of the natural sciences as well as its metaphors in Novalis' novel *The Apprentices of Sais (Die Lehrlinge zu Sais)*: Jocelyn Holland, *German Romanticism and Science. The Procreative Poetics of Goethe, Novalis, and Ritter* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 95–115. We also recommend the study on the use of mathematics in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* by Franziska Bomski, *Die Mathematik im Denken und Dichten von Novalis. Zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Wissen um 1800*, 147–208. See too Jürgen Daiber's work on the role of experiment and experimentation in both of Novalis' unfinished novels: Jürgen Daiber, *Experimentalphysik des Geistes. Novalis und das romantische Experiment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 169–262.

¹⁹ It could be argued that Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95) actually constitutes the most influential work in Novalis' theoretical conception of science and morality, given the thorough study and reception in Novalis' *Fichte-Studien*, *Fichte-Exzerpten* and even within *Das allgemeine Brouillon*. In fact, Hardenberg refers to Fichte's system as "the scheme of relations of science in general" ("*das Relationsschema der Wissenschaften überhaupt*") (HKA III, p. 378). However, we agree with Dalia Nassar on the even more decisive influence of Hemsterhuis' philosophy regarding neither morality nor science, but the connection between them both in favor of a universal knowledge, which is to be accomplished through the moral organ. In this respect, Nassar emphasizes what she calls "the relational dimension of moral experience". Dalia Nassar, "Beyond the Subjective Self: Hemsterhuis, Kant, and the Question of the Whole", in *The Romantic Absolute. Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795–1804* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2013), 41.

a relatively extensive philosophical treatise in the form of a letter, this work is not structured into chapters or sections.²⁰ In fact, the basic definition of one of the key concepts in the whole essay, namely, the notion of organ (*organe*), can be found on the very first page:

A being which has the faculty of sense can have a sensation of another substance only by means of ideas or images, which arise from the relations that hold between this substance [on the one hand] and [on the other] this being or what separates it from this being, which I call organ: that is, I dub organ not only the eye that sees, but also the light reflected from the object; not only the ear that hears, but also the air set in oscillation by the movements of the object.²¹

Hemsterhuis here provides a broad definition of organ: it is the only instrument through which any relationship between objects and sensations can take place. In this regard, “organ” means, on the one hand, specifically what we commonly name “organ” in our bodies, such as our eyes or ears. On the other hand, it refers to the environmental *medium* through which a certain substance is perceived. Therefore, we take note of substances or things only through organs. In other words: it is solely because of the existence of organs that we are capable of actually connecting ourselves to the external world and of further developing any kind of knowledge.

In addition, we can either perceive a substance through our organs temporarily or remember it based on previous experiences. In the latter case, we are using an “intuitive faculty” that allows us to “recall ideas by means of signs”, and consequently, cause them to “coexist.”²² Hemsterhuis terms this faculty “reason” (*raison*), and indicates it as the distinctive factor between human and animal beings. The more ideas that coexist in a given individual, the more intelligent or capable of reasoning that individual will be.

For Hemsterhuis, the universe unfolds itself through certain faces (*faces*) by which the seeds (*semences*) of which it is composed, as well as its diverse combinations, can be perceived:

Just as the organ of touch reveals the universe as tangible to the individual man, just as hearing and air reveal the universe as audible to him, just as sight and light reveal the universe as visible to him –

²⁰ For a full perspective on the form and composition of Hemsterhuis’s text and its context, reception, and translations, see Jacob van Sluis’s “Introduction” in *François Hemsterhuis. Œuvres philosophiques* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 3–83.

²¹ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 184, EE 1, 89.

²² Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 188, EE 1, 91.

so what he calls heart or conscience, and society with homogenous beings, reveal the universe as moral to him.²³

Since the various faces of the universe are characterized by their immeasurability (*incommensurabilité*), the moral organ, which is also designated as heart²⁴, conscience or sentiment, displays a completely heterogeneous perspective in comparison to sight, touch or any other organ. But what makes the moral organ even more unique is that it is the only one that permits us to “perceive our existence”, compared to the other organs, “which only allow us to perceive the relations with things outside us.”²⁵

Hemsterhuis laments how underdeveloped the moral organ is compared to hearing or sight. He argues that the only way in which the human being can cultivate “the moral face of the universe” (*la face morale de l’univers*) is through interactions within society, namely “communication with rational beings, with free wills (velleities), with primitive causes.” Thanks to these interactions, the “intuitive faculty” of the moral organ can ultimately derive the internal laws of the relationships within society.²⁶

The moral organ differs from the intelligence precisely because it is not a capacity that abstracts phenomena in order to create a general concept or idea. In fact, desire, duty, and virtue are not merely universal concepts but basic sensations obtained by the moral organ. According to Hemsterhuis, when we experience those sensations we feel completely passive as would be the case with any visible, audible, or physical sensation. The only difference lies in the perspective: from the standpoint of the moral face of the universe, we tend to feel that “*I desire* and *I have to*”, precisely because in this internal reign of morality “the I itself becomes an object of contemplation.”²⁷

Hemsterhuis points out that the moral organ is diversely developed in each human being, resulting in different degrees of duty and virtue. But the ultimate goal of humanity remains the same. Let us give passage quoted above in more detail:

the greatest happiness to which it seems that man can aspire at all times resides in the increase of perfection or sensibility of the moral

²³ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 230, EE 1, 103 (trans. modified).

²⁴ By associating the moral organ with the heart (*cœur*), Hemsterhuis’s conception approaches not only Early German Romanticism, but most organicism theories from the Modern Era as described by Eric Ackermann, *Worte und Werte. Geld und Sprache bei Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Johann Georg Hamann and Adam Müller* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997), 282–83.

²⁵ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 232.

²⁶ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 232.

²⁷ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 250, EE 1, 105.

organ, which will increase his joys and bring him closer to God and the active principles subordinate to Him.

The greatest wisdom to which he can lay claim consists in rendering all his actions and thoughts analogous to the impulses of his moral organ.²⁸

The goal of human existence manifests itself as a twofold task: on the one side, it is an ethical seeking of happiness. On the other side, it is a quest for harmony, namely acting and thinking in accordance with the moral organ's predisposition. Hence, Hemsterhuis concludes that only through the cultivation of the sensibility of the moral organ and not through prayers, superstition, or merely theoretical philosophical systems, can mankind attain its full well-being, thereby drawing closer to God.²⁹

At the end of his *Lettre*, Hemsterhuis outlines a definition of science:

The science or knowledge of man, consists in the ideas that are acquired by means of the senses, and in [the ideas] of the relations that hold between these ideas. The former [ideas] are isolated and represent isolated objects; the latter derive from the coexistence of that number of the first [kind] which the intuitive faculty can embrace at once. The totality of knowledge, or science in general, is therefore composed of the sum of acquired ideas and of ideas by relation.³⁰

As Hemsterhuis points out, “the totality of knowledge or of science in general” (*la totalité des connaissances, ou de la science en général*) requires the multiplication of both types of ideas, namely those that are directly received and those corresponding to the relationships between them. Only when gathering this nearly infinite number derived from an enormous number of combinations could mankind claim to reunite with God. If this moment arrives, human science will have been demonstrated to be perfect, and more importantly, it would be one and only as it is originally considered by God, who truly looks beyond any kind of human division into unconnected scientific branches.³¹

²⁸ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 256, EE 1, 112.

²⁹ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 265-278, EE 1, 118.

³⁰ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 288, EE 1, 122.

³¹ The longing for unity is a consistent topic in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, and it also appears in his *Lettre sur les désirs* (1770). Rooted in Plato and Spinoza, Hemsterhuis's philosophy directly and indirectly influenced the commonly called *Vereinigungsphilosophie* as shown by Claudia Melica in the case of Hegel's thought: Melica, Claudia, “Longing for Unity: Hemsterhuis and Hegel”, *Hegel Bulletin*, 28/1 (2007): 143–67.

To conclude this section, it is worth highlighting two Hemsterhuisian notions that originated in astronomy but have been metaphorically manifested throughout human history: the aphelia and the perihelia.³² Hemsterhuis affirms that:

The science of man, or the human mind, appears to move around perfection, like comets around the Sun, by describing very eccentric curves: it likewise has its perihelia and its aphelia [...]

I note that, in every perihelion, there has reigned a general spirit which spread its tone or its colour over all sciences and all arts, or over all branches of human knowledge.

In our perihelion, this general spirit could be defined by the spirit of geometry or the symmetrical [spirit]; in the perihelion of the Greeks, by the moral or sentimental spirit.³³

Although not exactly in the same perihelion as in ancient Greece, Hemsterhuis finds during his own time a flourishing era in terms of scientific knowledge, a fact which is especially noticeable in the geometrical spirit that can measure all kinds of phenomena. This happens mainly because of an overdevelopment of the organs of sight and hearing, which leads mankind to the inevitable specialization and separation of the sciences.

In fact, Hemsterhuis regrets how human ambitions to hear and to contemplate every external physical object has undermined the sensibility of the moral organ, which he considers to be exceedingly underdeveloped in his own epoch:

I admit it: but does man need the arts? Yet what a prodigious number of ideas does he owe to the arts and sciences! I admit it once more: but do you believe that all these intelligences would not have been refined by love, by friendship, by their relation to the Supreme Being? Do you believe that they would not have made as many discoveries concerning the moral face of the universe as we have made concerning the visible or audible face?³⁴

We can finally define Hemsterhuis's concept of morality. It is the sensitive or intuitive capacity of the human being to act in favor of his own development

³² While the aphelion is the point in the Earth's orbit where it is farthest from the Sun, the perihelion is the point of the Earth's orbit that is nearest to the Sun. Hemsterhuis and Novalis use these astronomical concepts as analogous of the epistemological-moral development of mankind.

³³ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 292; EE 1, 123.

³⁴ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 300; EE 1, 126.

as an individual and as a species. Still, Hemsterhuis claims that the moral face of the universe is being forgotten by his own era. This oblivion forces humanity to artificially divide all science into a large number of disciplines, some of them which seem barely connected. The contemporary perihelia described by Hemsterhuis lacks a spirit for the unity for all science, consequently preventing the enhancement of the particular disciplines through a development of the moral organ.

3. Novalis's Unification of the Sciences through Morality

Hemsterhuis's anthropological and epistemological diagnosis can be found several decades after his *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* in Novalis's theoretical reflections, especially in his so-called encyclopedistics. Hardenberg makes it clear in *Das allgemeine Brouillon* that the division of the sciences has been excessive. Accordingly, he believes that mankind needs to find its way back to the union of all knowledge or at least try to reconnect its multiple separated expressions.

This particular purpose does not imply that Novalis refuses classifications and their effectiveness. In fact, he outlines several schemes of the possible division of sciences, most of them based on the encyclopedias he read at that time.³⁵ For example, in entry 196, he uses the title ENCYCLOPEDISTICS to specify two basic types of sciences:

Memory sciences = elementary sciences of Nature (Elements of Nature. Elements of art.) 2. Sciences of combinatorial ability = sciences of compounds etc.

1. Absolute memory sciences. Derived. 2. absolute combinatorial sciences. *Derived*.³⁶

³⁵ Although it is not precisely an encyclopedia in the common meaning of the word, Novalis's project in *Das allgemeine Brouillon* employs numerous manuals, lexica, and dictionaries as well as other scholarly works in order to better comprehend and classify the sciences. Among others, Hardenberg thoroughly studies D'Alembert and Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) (especially the *Discours préliminaire* by D'Alembert), Wilhelm Traugott Krug's *Versuch einer Systematischen Enzyklopädie der Wissenschaften* (1796-1797), Johann Heinrich Lambert's *Neues Organon oder Gedanken über die Erforschung und Bezeichnung des Wahren und dessen Unterscheidung vom Irrthum und Schein* (1764), and Dietrich Tiedemann's *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* (1791-1797). A historical and intellectual account of the encyclopedic sources of Novalis's *Brouillon* can be found in Hans-Joachim Mähl, "Novalis und Plotin", in *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1963), 139–250.

³⁶ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 30 (HKA III, 275).

This brief classification is a good example of Novalis's use of textual sources. The entry mixes Jean le Rond D'Alembert's division from the *Discours préliminaire de L'Encyclopédie* with Hemsterhuis's classification from the *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*. The term "memory sciences" (*Gedächtniß Wissenschaften*) seems to be related to D'Alembert's introduction to the French encyclopedia, where he classifies all knowledge according to its origin: memory, reason, and imagination (*mémoire, raison, imagination*).³⁷ But the expression "memory sciences" could also be associated with Hemsterhuis's "ideas acquired by means of the senses" (*idées acquises par le moyen des sens*), which are essentially characterized as "isolated" and "representing isolated objects."

In addition to this conceptual relationship, Hemsterhuis inspires Novalis's second category of knowledge: the "sciences of combinatorial ability" or "absolute combinatorial sciences", which seems to be rooted in the "ideas of relationship" from the *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*. In the aforementioned entry 196, Hardenberg shows his encyclopedic interest in dividing sciences, but only to consider the more significant combinatorial aspect intrinsic to human knowledge. This interest is shared by Hemsterhuis, and it is related to D'Alembert and Diderot's conception of encyclopedia, which may be understood as a huge circle that connects all knowledge.³⁸

³⁷ D'Alembert also defines memory within his "system of direct knowledge", from which originates the science of history and its derivations: "memory can only consist in the pure passive and mechanical-like collection of the same knowledge." Jean le Rond D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* (Paris: Gonthier, 1965), 62.

³⁸ There seems to be only one article in the entire *Novalis-Forschung* that shows encyclopedistics in the light of Hemsterhuis's philosophy of science: the aforementioned "Vers une science totale : l'encyclopédistique vivante de Novalis". Throughout this text, Laure Cahen-Maurel describes the idea of an all-encompassing- unifying "science of sciences" in *Das allgemeine Brouillon's* encyclopedistics. She highlights that Novalis "keeps emphasizing, in line with Hemsterhuis, the solidarity of each particular science with the rest, and the permeability between them." Laure Cahen Maurel, "Vers une science totale", 9. We also feel compelled to add that D'Alembert's and Diderot's *Encyclopédie* also attempts to combine and link every science to a whole system of knowledge. This particular purpose can be observed in the so-called "combined designators" (*désignants combinés*) which classify entries not only thematically, but also relationally. This operation of combining two or more designators allows the reader of the encyclopedia to connect different domains of knowledge in one particular entry. For further information about the use of combined designators by D'Alembert and Diderot, see Alain Cernuschi's article on the entry "erudition" (*érudition*): Alain Cernuschi, "Des désignants combinés ou vers une dimension opératoire des articles de l'Encyclopédie", *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, 40–41 (2006), 93–106.

Entry 198 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* follows the epistemological reflections from the previous notes, and can be compared with the annotations from the *Hemsterhuis-Studien*, as shown in the following table:

<p style="text-align: center;">Novalis, <i>Das allgemeine Brouillon</i> (1798-1799)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Novalis, <i>Hemsterhuis-Studien</i> (1797)</p>
<p>ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. According to Hemsterhuis, science on the whole is composed of the product of the memory sciences, or given knowledge, and of the rational sciences, or created (acquired) knowledge. The latter are merely the work of man. Therefore, science on the whole is generally the <i>total function</i> of the <i>data</i> and the <i>facts</i> — the <i>n</i>-th power of the <i>binomial series of the data and the facts</i>. Here <i>combinatorial analysis</i> would be necessary.³⁹</p>	<p>The totality of knowledge, or science on the whole consists therefore in the sum of the <i>received</i> and the <i>acquired</i> knowledge —since all relationship ideas are the <i>work</i> of man. The greatness of human science will therefore be determined through the sum of the primitive ideas, multiplied by the sum of the secondary ideas. [pp. 227-28].⁴⁰</p>

In both texts, Novalis follows almost exactly the division of knowledge proposed by Hemsterhuis. On the one hand, there are isolated or received ideas (*erhaltene*). On the other hand, there are acquired or created ideas (*erworbene*). All sciences can be derived from this classification, and they can also be combined *in infinitum* as if they were mathematical power series.⁴¹ The expressions used by Hardenberg are mainly translations of Hemsterhuisian “received ideas” (*idées acquises*) and “relationship ideas” (*idées de rapport*).⁴²

³⁹ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 30 (HKA III, 275).

⁴⁰ HKA II, 367.

⁴¹ The Novalisian idea of classifying knowledge (following Hemsterhuis’s concepts) in order to give a mathematical scheme of sciences, whose facts and data can be related and even combined is thoroughly addressed by Franziska Bomski: *Die Mathematik im Denken und Dichten von Novalis*, 141-146.

⁴² Note that it was decided to translate “*erhalten*” as “received” and “*erworben*” as “acquired”. This is in response to a compromised solution, given that Hemsterhuisian

The only significant addition from Novalis's *Brouillon* in comparison to his own *Hemsterhuis-Studien* and Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* is the equivalence of memory and received sciences, a classification that we already attributed to the reading of D'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire* at that time.

The particular interest of Novalis in what he calls "science on the whole" (*Wissenschaft im Großen*), a concept he derives from Hemsterhuis's "total science" (*science totale*) or "science in general" (*science en général*), should also be noted. This all-unifying knowledge would be obtained by means of a mathematical calculation, namely multiplication, which in this particular case, involves the two aforementioned categories of sciences.

The same idea of connecting knowledge through multiple epistemological or mathematical methods, such as analogy, multiplication, combination, exponentiation, or romanticization, appears frequently throughout *Das allgemeine Brouillon*. Therefore, this recurring idea should be viewed as Novalis's original attempt to solve the philosophical problem of the disunity of the sciences.⁴³

Hardenberg, who was almost completely up-to-date with most of the natural and formal sciences of his time⁴⁴, considers the division of scientific disciplines as a completely artificial process that hides knowledge's true nature. Entry 199 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* refers to Novalis's previous *Hemsterhuis-Studien* as well as to Hemsterhuis's remarks in his *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, as shown in the following table:

idées acquises would better correspond to Novalis's *erhaltene Kenntnisse* if we consider this expression in an isolated way. But Hemsterhuis's *idées de rapport* do not appear to be translated literally in Novalis's text. Instead, he opts for using *erworbene Ideen* or *Kenntnisse*, which we translate here – for lack of a better expression, as "acquired" or "created", in order to slightly separate these kinds of ideas from the passive nuance of the "received" ones. In this case, it could be argued that Novalis's use of *erworben* would have failed to note the difference between what is merely acquired (*acquire*) or received, and what is actively created by combining and relating.

⁴³ For further details on Novalis's approach to the problem of knowledge overflow, the constant separation of sciences, and the difficulties related to the management of scientific information, see Santiago Napoli and Maria Inés Silenzi, "Novalis y H. Dreyfus frente a la sobrecarga de información. El fracaso del aspecto epistemológico de la relevancia", *Eikasia* 95 (September–November, 2020): 345–68.

⁴⁴ Novalis's scientific skills as well as his training are detailed and discussed in chapters in Herbert Uerlings (ed.), *Novalis und die Wissenschaften* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997).

Novalis, <i>Das allgemeine Brouillon</i> (1798-1799)	Novalis, <i>Hemsterhuis- Studien</i> (1797)	Hemsterhuis, <i>Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports</i> (1772)
ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. We owe the most sublime truths of our day to contact with the long-separated elements of the total-science. Hemsterhuis. ⁴⁵	Sciences are separated by the lack of genius and sharpness – the relationships between them are too complicated for the human intellect and dullness, and too separated from each other. We owe the most sublime truths of our day to those combinations between the long-separated elements of the total-science. ⁴⁶	The science of man, which is properly one, has formed innumerable branches in the course of time, to the extent that the intuitive faculty has found specific clusters of homogeneous or homologous objects, whose ideal coexistence was the easiest to achieve, or whose particular relations were less distanced than between more heterogeneous objects. ⁴⁷

Although Hemsterhuis seems to describe what is in essence the same scientific scenario as Novalis, the expression “the most sublime truths of our day” comes entirely from the latter author. It is clear to Hardenberg that these “truths” were reached through either the contact (as in the *Brouillon*) or the combinations (as in the *Hemsterhuis-Studien*) of the elements (*Glieder*) of the total science or science on the whole. By emphasizing the relational-combinatorial power of human reason to produce knowledge, Novalis offers a crucial solution to the epistemological problem of the over-specialization of sciences. In contrast to Novalis’s active position, the passage from Hemsterhuis’s *Lettre* mainly focuses on the negative aspect of the separation of the sciences, which originated from the human being’s intuitive faculty to mechanically find homogeneous objects.

Just like any scholar who tries to better understand the subject being studied, Novalis constantly rephrases Hemsterhuis using his own terms. He also reuses some fragments from his own earlier notes. This can be observed above in entry 199 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon*. In this case, in accordance

⁴⁵ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 30 (HKA III, 275).

⁴⁶ HKA II, 368.

⁴⁷ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 290; EE 1, 122.

with the purposes of his encyclopedistics, Hardenberg decides to only mention the unifying character of the total science and its power to produce the greatest truths, consequently leaving unquoted the corresponding previous sentence of the *Hemsterhuis-Studien*, where he specifically addresses the separation of the sciences.

In his own encyclopedistics, Novalis seeks to apply Hemsterhuis's notion of an all-encompassing science as well as its classification. However, it still remains unclear how he proposes to carry this out, given the critical context of an increasing separation of all scientific disciplines. A possible answer to this question appears within Hemsterhuis's philosophical framework. The following table compares entry 197 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* with its corresponding note in the *Hemsterhuis-Studien* as well as the referred-to passage in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*:

<p style="text-align: center;">Novalis, <i>Das allgemeine Brouillon</i> (1798-1799)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Novalis, <i>Hemsterhuis-</i> <i>Studien</i> (1797)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Hemsterhuis, <i>Lettre sur</i> <i>l'homme et ses</i> <i>rappports</i> (1772)</p>
<p>ENCYCLOPEDISTICS. The magical sciences, <i>according to Hemsterhuis</i>, arise through the application of the moral sense to the other senses— i.e. through the moralization of the universe and the other sciences.⁴⁸</p>	<p>The <i>superstitious sciences</i> arise through the <i>effectiveness</i> of the moral organ on <i>the other</i> (lower) <i>organs</i>.⁴⁹</p>	<p>I should have spoken about the extravagance of the adoration of the stars, of animals and of plants; but it is enough to remark that the moral organ gives us real sensations of the Supreme Being's presence; that not only do the other organs communicate movement to the moral organ, but conversely, this organ often communicates to the other organs;⁵⁰</p>

Entry 197 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* conceptualizes some of Hemsterhuis's reflections on the moral organ freely, thus giving an account

⁴⁸ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 30 (HKA III, 275).

⁴⁹ HKA II, 367.

⁵⁰ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 274-276; EE 1, 117.

of Novalis's own notion of morality. Following Fichte's primacy of practical over theoretical reason as well as his conception of God as the moral order of the universe⁵¹, Hardenberg finds that the moral aspect of mankind can be understood as its performative capacity to transform separated elements within a teleology of unity. This idea is entirely compatible with Hemsterhuis's concept of moral organ, which also acts as a communicative and unifying force.⁵²

According to both authors, the moral organ is inherently connected with the other organs or senses, consequently generating the so-called "magical sciences" (*magische Wissenschaften*). However, it should be noted that the concept of magic, alongside its derivations, does not appear in Hemsterhuis's treatise. We only find the vague idea of "the extravagance of the worship of stars, animals, and plants" (*l'extravagance des adorations d'astres, d'animaux et de plantes*). It is then plausible that Novalis derived the "superstitious sciences" (*abergläubige Wissenschaften*) (*Hemsterhuis-Studien*) as well as the aforementioned "magical sciences" (in *Das allgemeine Brouillon*) from that particular passage.

Novalis's ambiguous use of Hemsterhuisian concepts is perhaps motivated by his interest in applying the moral organ's power in order to unify and enhance the increasingly separate sciences.⁵³ Consequently, this infinite force developed by humanity plays a significant role in the encyclopedistical task of continually approaching the desired total science or science on the whole.

Some pages before entries 196-199, Novalis indicates how he understands the relationship between morality and magic. Entry 61 of the *Brouillon* asserts:

⁵¹ For further details on Fichte's influence on Novalis's moral conception throughout the *Brouillon*, especially in light of the "moralization of nature" (*Moralisation der Natur*), see Bernward Loheide: *Fichte und Novalis. Transzendentalphilosophisches Denken im romantisierenden Diskurs* (Amsterdam – Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), 309-319.

⁵² We can even go further in our interpretation by adding that Hemsterhuis's moral organ would operate similarly to Fichte's intellectual intuition, given that in both cases morality functions as a completely intuitive and non-discursive faculty essentially linked to human action.

⁵³ From a Spinozian perspective, this unifying force of the moral organ, which Hemsterhuis also named "heart", can be identified with the concept of love, which in this case could be understood as the infinite power to congregate all entities. This interpretation is supported by Hans Jürgen Balmes: "Kommentar zu Hemsterhuis und Kant-Studien", in *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Band 3: Kommentar von Hans Jürgen Balmes* (München - Wien: Carl Hanser, 1987), 316-18.

THEOSOPHY. In order to be truly moral, we must endeavor to become magicians. The more moral, the more in harmony *with God*. The more divine—the more in *communion* with God. It is only through the moral sense that God will become perceptible to us. – The moral sense is the sense for *existence*, without *external affection*—the sense for *unity*—the sense for the highest—the sense for *harmony*—the sense for the freely chosen, and innovative, and yet *communal* life—and Being—the sense for the thing in itself—the true *sense of divination* /⁵⁴

In this note, Novalis sees magic as a previous step to what seems to be the highest peak of humanity: morality. The intuitive function of the moral sense or moral organ⁵⁵ operates in a certain way that allows man to harmonize with God through his own “sense of divination” (*Divinationssinn*). By means of the combinatorial and unifying power of its sixth organ, humanity can ultimately reach divinity.⁵⁶ It is evident that the achievement of this ideal would effectively require the possession of the total science, namely, the gathering of all of existing received ideas multiplied by their almost infinite relationship ideas. If that eventually occurs, human knowledge would be close to perfection, and the sciences would no longer be separated or isolated. Just as Hemsterhuis concludes in his *Lettre*:

If man had ideas of all the relations, and all the combinations of these objects, he would resemble God, both in regard to science and in regard

⁵⁴ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 9-10 (HKA III, 250).

⁵⁵ Besides the fact that Hemsterhuis commonly identifies sense and organ, it is clear that Novalis also refers to the moral organ when using the expression “*Moralischer Sinn*”, as shown in *Das allgemeine Brouillon*: “Hemsterhuis’s theory of the moral sense. — His conjectures on the perfectibility and possible infinite use of this sense—Philosophical ethics— poetical ethics.” Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 144 (HKA III, 420).

⁵⁶ This combinatorial-unifying aspect of human knowledge has its roots in Leibnizian mathematics, which Novalis had theoretically mastered when he wrote his *Brouillon*. Contrary to what may be concluded, Hardenberg did not study Leibniz’s mathematics directly, but through the so-called German combinatorial school (*Die kombinatorische Schule*), above all represented at the time by Carl Friedrich Hindenburg. However, it should be noted that the ideas of this school actually derive from Leibniz’s theoretical approaches, and even though Novalis refers to combinatorics in a broad and not exclusively quantitative sense, he indirectly follows the Leibnizian tradition, which was prevalent at that time in German mathematics. For more information on Novalis and the combinatorial school, see Philippe Séguin: “Von der Philosophie zur ars combinatoria. Novalis’ Erwartungen an die Mathematik und die Folgen”, in A. Albrecht, G. von Essen, & W. Frick (Eds.), *Zahlen, Zeichen und Figuren: Mathematische Inspirationen in Kunst und Literatur* (Berlin: De Gruyter), 248–267.

to the state of the universe insofar as we know it, and his science would be perfect.⁵⁷

4. Novalis's Enhancement of the Sciences through Morality

We have already stated that Novalis aspires to the moralization of the sciences through encyclopedistics, i.e., that he conceives an authentic *mathesis universalis moralis*. The full meaning of this expression should be becoming clearer. But it still needs to be demonstrated that Novalis's employment of Hemsterhuis's moral organ is capable of benefiting science from the inside out as it were, namely, via its methods, discoveries, and explanations.

Entry 1082 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* contends:

Continuation of the *Hemsterhuisian thought* — concerning the peculiar change in the way man pictures the world on account of the Copernican hypothesis—or on the certainty of *celestial bodies* — on the certainty, that the Earth is *suspended* in fresh air.⁵⁸

Throughout the *Brouillon*, Novalis often emphasizes how Copernicus's thesis may function as an inspiration for all the sciences. Indeed, the above entry 1082 connects “the Copernican hypothesis” with “the *Hemsterhuisian thought*” about changes “in the way man pictures the world.” The Copernican method is considered by Hardenberg as a true benefit for all knowledge, since it allows scientists to reverse the current perspective on any phenomena, consequently shifting the dominant theoretical point of view. In other words, Novalis maintains that future scientists should learn to “turn data and methods around.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 288-290; EE 1, 122.

⁵⁸ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 181 (HKA III, 467). This entry also gives an account of the role played by the notion of ‘hypothesis’ in Novalis's thought, which constitutes a motor for new scientific discoveries and theoretical revolutions. Regarding this particular aspect, see Jocelyn Holland's insightful interpretation: “Elements from earlier eighteenth-century discussions of the hypothesis – the idea of uncertainty, of something risked, of a tentative foundational gesture that is merely one in a series of steps – return, transformed, in the worldview of Early German Romanticism.” Jocelyn Holland, “Ein Schuß in die blaue Luft. The Early German Romantic Hypothesis”, *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 3 (2021): 92.

⁵⁹ This particular expression is taken from entry 517 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon*: “All good researchers—physicians, observers and thinkers, proceed like Copernicus — they turn the data and methods around, to see whether or not they fit better this way”. Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 92 (HKA III, 355). Laure Cahen-Maurel identifies this methodological revitalization of the Copernican Turn by Novalis with the *inversus* method, that is, the backwards movement of the human being's infinite intellectual activity. She also explains how this principle of “turning data and methods around” works in Hardenberg's encyclopedistics not only

Insofar as Novalis's reading of scientific progress is driven by revolutions, it may be said to resemble Thomas Kuhn's historical perspective from the second half of the 20th century.⁶⁰ This relates in turn to a passage from the *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, in which Hemsterhuis affirms that:

The greatest revolution that took place in mankind's ideas was when philosopher taught them, in an incontestable manner, that this globe was just a planet like so many others; that this important thing was a nothing, and that the universe was infinite.⁶¹

These astronomical metaphors are repeatedly deployed in both Novalis's *Brouillon* and in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre* to illustrate scientific procedures, and especially to point out the extent to which certain existing methodological issues, such as the lack of dynamism in scientific practice, might effectively be overcome. In this respect, the question occupying Novalis is not simply how to unify knowledge but how to enhance and increase it, i.e., how to potentialize or raise all of its forces to a higher power. The solution to this problem is exemplified in a Hemsterhuisian topic *par excellence*: the development of humanity's sensibility to the moral organ.

According to both these authors, it is the moral organ that speaks the intuitive language of the harmony of all things. For this very reason, it is obvious that science would greatly benefit from its proper unfolding and cultivation. Unfortunately, the cyclical movement of human history occasionally experiences a *regressus* or backsliding in some of its aspects. This idea too is directly linked with astronomy, as shown in the following table:

because of the influence of Hemsterhuisian thought, but also because of the heritage of Fichte's concept of reciprocal determination (*Wechselbestimmung*). See Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Vers une science totale", 104–108.

⁶⁰ Novalis's epistemology attempts to question scientific knowledge as something linear and constant. In this regard, the revaluation of the imagination as a malleable form of knowledge can be understood precisely as a response to a linear and constant conception of scientific progress, as shown by Jonas Maatsch: "*Naturgeschichte der Philosopheme*". *Frühromantische Wissensordnung im Kontext* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008), 145-151 and 175-190.

⁶¹ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 278; EE 1, 118. Although Hemsterhuis does not mention Copernicus and his theory, and focuses instead on the "philosophers" (*des Philosophes*), we find this passage useful to illustrate how he and Novalis share the same preoccupation regarding scientific theories and their future. The reference was originally suggested by Hans-Joachim Mähl "Das Allgemeine Brouillon: Anmerkungen", in *Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs. Dritter Band. Das Philosophische Werk II* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983), 994.

Novalis, <i>Das allgemeine Brouillon</i> (1798-1799)	Novalis, <i>Hemsterhuis-Studien</i> (1797)	Hemsterhuis, <i>Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports</i> (1772)
THEORY OF HUMAN HISTORY. Hemsterhuis's and Dumas's remarkable ideas on the aphelia and perihelia of the human spirit — the character of every perihelion, its origin and <i>formation</i> . ⁶²	The human spirit moves around the sun – it has its perihelia and its aphelia. In each perihelion, a certain spirit has indicated the tone. ⁶³	The science of man, or the human mind, appears to move around perfection, like comets around the Sun, by describing very eccentric curves: it likewise has its perihelia and its aphelia; but, by means of history, we know only about one and a half of its revolutions – that is, two perihelia and the aphelion which separates them. I note that, in every perihelion, there has reigned a general spirit which spread its tone or its colour over all sciences and all arts, or over all branches of human knowledge. ⁶⁴

Here Novalis seems to paraphrase Hemsterhuis's and his editor Frédéric Dumas's "remarkable ideas" (*merckwürdige Ideen*) concerning the progress of the human spirit.⁶⁵ According to the *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, history manifests two periods of flourishing culture – or perihelia – as well as a dark age of ignorance, that is, an aphelion. The first perihelion took place in Ancient Greece, and the second one occurred in the modern age. The difference between the two ages does not merely concern the dominant

⁶² Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 30 (HKA III, 275).

⁶³ HKA II, 368.

⁶⁴ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 292; EE 1, 123.

⁶⁵ For further details on the relationship between Dumas and Hemsterhuis, see van Sluis, "Introduction", 20–22.

science of the period, or as Novalis defines it, the “tone of the spirit” (*der Ton des Geistes*). Rather, what distinguishes the two perihelia is the degree of development of the moral organ.

If the perihelion of the modern age was characterized by its symmetry and the development of calculus, mechanics, and geometry, Ancient Greece’s perihelion was fundamentally defined by the development of the moral organ:

In the perihelion of the Greeks, or of the moral or sentimental spirit, the ideas of love, gratitude, ingratitude, hate, vengeance, and jealousy were ideas of relation almost as clear and perfect and determinate as those of a triangle and a circle.⁶⁶

Hemsterhuis’s diagnosis of the current state of human knowledge, therefore, is neither completely optimistic nor fully pessimistic. The philosopher is convinced that the natural sciences effectively contributed to a better understanding and determination of the world. However, he finds that the moral development of humanity at his time is on the verge of reaching its lowest point.⁶⁷ This manifests itself in society’s lack of sensitivity for justice, virtue, or duty, and ends up being a completely destructive factor for progress, since an increase in the sensitivity of all organs, especially the moral one, is precisely what is required for humanity to evolve.

The same diagnosis is present in Novalis’s *Brouillon*. Some of the epistemological observations he develops throughout his encyclopedistics advocate the education of the moral organ. They aim to enhance humanity’s general knowledge, which includes thinking as well as acting. If the natural sciences and logic primarily apply to theoretical thinking, the moral sciences directly apply to human action. This is argued for in entry 49 when Novalis affirms:

/ Originally, *knowledge* and *action* are *mixed*—then they separate, and at their goal they should again be *united*, and cooperative, harmonious, but not *mixed*. One will *at once* know and act in a reciprocal manner—know, how and what one does, do, how and what one knows. / ⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, 294.

⁶⁷ This decline of holism in the moral sphere appears also in Hemsterhuis’ work *Alexis, ou de l’âge d’or* (1787) also read by Novalis. For further details on this diagnosis as well as the future horizon of a reconciliation of allorgans, see Laure Cahen-Maurel’s article: “L’âge d’or futur. Novalis relu a partir de Schiller et de Hemsterhuis”, *Klesis*, 40 (2018), 111–14.

⁶⁸ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 7 (HKA III, 246).

This reflection is once again related to the astronomical metaphor previously employed about the Earth's orbit. If the first perihelion helped humanity to discover its theoretical capacity and the second one raised it to a higher power, it is solely through the union of these two forces that a harmonious enhancement of knowledge will finally be achieved, thus contributing to overcoming the lack of dynamism in science. It is imperative: both theoretical and practical organs (or in Kantian terms, "theoretical and practical reason") need to be harmoniously developed in order to clear the path for human's perfectibility. We should note that this will provide the current perihelion with an even more universal spirit, and in Hemsterhuis's words, "it will bring humanity closer to God", not just with regard to morality *strictu sensu*, but especially regarding science and its dynamic evolution. Since both Novalis and Hemsterhuis understand knowledge as intrinsically relational and combinatorial, its further development will require the consonant and simultaneous development of all its organs.

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of this article it was suggested that the meaning of morality we intended to connect with science would be uncorrelated with the concept as it is mostly used in contemporary philosophy and even in modern bioethics. Such a clarification was not futile, since the conception of morality of German Romanticism is, even today, hardly taken into consideration by most of the specialized studies that claim to link scientific knowledge with the moral sciences.

In contrast, this article has attempted to show that morality plays a significant role in the development of science in the case of Novalis's encyclopedistics, and this is largely due to the impact of Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* on *Das allgemeine Brouillon*. In fact, the Hemsterhuisian conception of morality and science is a true philosophical model for Hardenberg's idea of a *mathesis universalis moralis*, in which the latter may be understood as a genuine "total science" that has become integrated and boosted by the power of the moral organ.

To explore the role of Hemsterhuis's moral philosophy in Novalis's philosophy of science we first outlined certain biographical details about their intellectual relationship. This brought into relief the extent to which Hemsterhuis's thought had accompanied Novalis since his early philosophical studies and how this influence particularly manifested itself from 1797 onward when Hardenberg returned to a thorough reading of the Dutch philosopher's oeuvre. Novalis's in-depth study produced the

Hemsterhuis-Studien that the same year, a series of notes that the romantic thinker later utilized in 1798-1799 when developing his encyclopedistics project: *Das allgemeine Brouillon*.

We likewise considered it important to detail several crucial concepts in Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, to essentially try and clarify some of the historical obscurity in the works of the Dutch philosopher, which are recently being rediscovered. Given the increasing but still insufficient attention devoted to Hemsterhuis in the history of philosophy, a number of relevant ideas in Novalis's reception of this thinker were outlined, such as the "moral organ", "total science" or "aphelion / perihelion".

Furthermore, Novalis's reception of Hemsterhuisian moral philosophy and its connection to science were noted, particularly in line with two philosophical problems: on the one hand, the over-specialization and separation of the different scientific disciplines. And on the other hand, the lack of dynamism in scientific practice. These problems were addressed either directly or indirectly in quoted entries from Novalis's *Das allgemeine Brouillon*; these entries formed a link back to his own earlier notes titled *Hemsterhuis-Studien*, and all ultimately were inspired by a reading of Hemsterhuis's *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*.

To tackle the first of these two problems, we saw that Hardenberg considers the Hemsterhuisian notion of a "total science" from which all the other disciplines derive. Through a utilization of the ability to combine and unify knowledge found in the intuitive capacity of the moral organ, scientific phenomena will eventually be entirely connected, thus giving humanity the possibility of approaching divine perfection, i.e., of reintegrating this total science back into its knowledge as an interconnected universe.

To overcome the second of the problems, we noted the manner in which Novalis considers morality as an instrument for the improvement of science. Following Hemsterhuis's astronomical metaphors concerning human progress throughout history, the *Brouillon* presents the cultivation of the moral organ as a remainder of the "geometrical" era. It agrees with Hemsterhuis's hypothesis of the harmonious dynamization of science through the development of the moral organ, which will give humanity the opportunity to make new discoveries and generate further scientific revolutions. This constitutes the basis of both Novalis's and Hemsterhuis's original conception of a *mathesis universalis*, which not only embraces the theoretical aspects of science, but also human action and our sense of duty, virtue, and justice.

This article argued that the Novalian project of encyclopedistics manifests itself as a quest for the development of an all-encompassing system

of knowledge, namely, a *mathesis universalis*, which may be characterized as *moralis* primarily due to the heritage of Hemsterhuis's philosophy. Since it principally dealt with the reception of one thinker by another, it seems appropriate to conclude this article with Hardenberg's own words regarding his appreciation for this philosophical operation in particular. Contrary to the common cliché of a romantic obsession with originality, entry 220 from *Das allgemeine Brouillon* perhaps reveals best of all why Novalis himself studied other philosophers as intensely as he studied Hemsterhuis:

THEORY OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION. One studies foreign systems in order to find one's *own system*. A foreign system is the stimulus for *one's own*. I become conscious of my own philosophy, physics etc.—by becoming affected by a foreign one—provided of course I myself am sufficiently active.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 32 (HKA III, 278).

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The Ethics and Politics of Force in Hemsterhuis, Herder, Goethe, Schiller and G nderrode

*Gabriel Trop**

ABSTRACT

Romantic art and philosophy often draw upon the concept of force (*Kraft*) to reimagine ethical and political relations. A decisive impulse for the Romantic concept of force can be found in the work of Franois Hemsterhuis, who articulates a paradigm of *ecstatic* force. This paper examines two divergent and productive responses to Hemsterhuis' account of ecstatic force: on the one hand, *redirected force*, here represented by Herder's and Goethe's reinterpretation of Hemsterhuis, both of whom seek to channel the form-dissolving potential of force into appropriate and stabilizing collective forms; and on the other hand, *unconditioning force*, represented by Friedrich Schiller (before his encounter with Kant) and Karoline von G nderrode, in which tendencies toward disindividuation are directed against hegemonic and hierarchizing political forms. G nderrode draws on the nature-philosophical ontology of force in the poem "Brutus" to preserve a democratic republican ideal and to contravene the course of history in its movement from Republic to Empire.

Keywords: aesthetics, ethics, *Naturphilosophie*, ontology, politics

R SUM 

Les  uvres artistiques et philosophiques de la p riode romantique s'appuient souvent sur le concept scientifique de force (*Kraft*) afin de repenser les relations  thiques et politiques. L'une des sources majeures de cette nouvelle conceptualisation de la force se trouve chez Franois Hemsterhuis, qui d finit celle-ci   l'aide d'un paradigme qu'on pourrait qualifier d'« extatique ». La pr sente contribution examine deux r interpr tations productives quoique divergentes de cette conception hemsterhuisienne d'une force extatique : d'une part *la force redirig e*, dont les repr sentants sont Herder et Goethe, et qui engage l'id e de canaliser le potentiel destructeur de la force afin de stabiliser les formes collectives ; d'autre part *la force qui lib re de tout conditionnement*, telle que l'entendent Friedrich Schiller (dans les  uvres ant rieures   sa r ception de la pens e kantienne) et Karoline von G nderrode. Schiller et G nderrode mobilisent le potentiel de d sint gration de la force contre des formes politiques h g moniques et hi rarchiques. Dans son po me « Brutus », par exemple, G nderrode invoque l'ontologie des forces de la nature pour pr server un id al r publicain d mocratique et s'opposer au cours de l'histoire dans le passage de la R publique   l'Empire.

Mots-cl s : esth tique,  thique, *Naturphilosophie*, ontologie, politique

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1. Introduction

Force, by definition invisible, only ever manifests itself through material effects that point to something beyond themselves, an inscrutability that compels, governs, attracts, repels, potentiates, actualizes, creates, destroys.¹ From its inception as a key term of Aristotelian metaphysics (force as potentiality, *dunamis*) to its centrality in Newton's theory of universal gravitation, force functions as a boundary concept. As an imperceptible physical given, it generates and regulates differences, indicates the frontiers that organize the emergence of individuated beings; as a concept, it is replete with multiple attractors, binding and separating diverse discursive domains: the empirical and the ontological, the theological and the scientific, the aesthetic and the political. Flexible, pliable and protean, force contains multitudes.

The concept of force, within its specific field of operativity, exhibits a tendency toward expansion: ontologically across all beings, but also discursively into all forms of organization and differentiation. It is thus not surprising that, over the course of the long history of the concept, key contributions to philosophical thought and aesthetic production have expanded the concept of force to encompass the domain of ethics and politics. The intersection between the semantics of force and practices that draw upon this semantics to reimagine or rethink the entirety of ethical or political relations constitutes a significant task for thought, one that extends into the present. Works drawing on the Romantic philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*), above all as inaugurated by Friedrich Schelling, intimate the contemporaneity of such a programme by developing the concept of force (*Kraft*) as unconditioned (*unbedingt*), and hence, as invested with a power of unconditioning.² Unconditioned force “unthings” entities by refusing to reduce them to objects to be known, grasped, manipulated, or contained. Even more capaciously, Romantic processes of unconditioning are not limited to the human, but extend over the entire domain of appearances: the inorganic, the vegetal, the animal, as well as the human.

¹ Numerous recent publications associated with the Centre for Advanced Studies “Imaginarium of Force” (*Imaginarium der Kraft*) have foregrounded the centrality of this concept to the cultural imagination of the West in multiple discursive realms—scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic, to name only a few. See, for example: Frank Fehrenbach, Lutz Hengst, Frederike Middelhoff, Cornelia Zumbusch (eds.), *Form- und Bewegungskräfte in Kunst, Literatur und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022); and particularly relevant for Romanticism, Adrian Renner and Frederike Middelhoff, *Forces of Nature: Dynamism and Agency in German Romanticism* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022).

² For the unconditioned as a process of unconditioning, see Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

The conditions for speculative experimentation with ethical and political relations through the semantics of force can be found long before Romantic thought takes up this task. Dante's *Divine Comedy* had already established the tension between gravity and light as constitutive for the history of salvation (indeed, for history as such), and the cosmologies of Marsilio Ficino, Giordano Bruno, and Jakob Böhme equally harness the concept of force (physical, erotic, theological) to redress the problematic conditions of their cultural status quo. Even more decisive for the Romantic concept of unconditioning force, however, is the work of François Hemsterhuis, which rethinks modes of human relationality, sources of cultural and political normativity, and the order of history by means of an idiosyncratic consonance between Newtonian force and Platonic operations of the soul. Aesthetic and philosophical thought experiments indebted to Hemsterhuis' thought—this paper will specifically consider works by Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and Günderrode—draw upon force to initiate a reevaluation of the ethical and political conditions of existence.

The relation between force, ethics, and politics is not merely of antiquarian interest. In one strand of the tradition that examines this relation—a strand that has a robust afterlife in the twentieth century and in contemporary thought—the concept of force (*Kraft*) drifts from its natural-ontological paradigms (Aristotelian potentiality or Newtonian universal gravitation) into modes of relationality suffused with violence: force as domination. Simone Weil, writing on the cusp of World War II, inscribes herself in the tradition of a nature-philosophical ethics and politics in dialogue with mystical and Gnostic sources by construing force—a transcendental-material condition of being whose natural expression is the force of gravity—as the principle of evil and injustice: “obedience to the force of gravity” is “the greatest sin.”³ As a cultural paradigm of human relationality and dominion, Weil claims that force names the most deeply entrenched interpersonal, cultural and political tendencies of the West. *The Iliad*, as the first and greatest “poem of force,” already brings this paradigm to full expression (hence its eternal contemporaneity, rather than antiquity, as a key to latent or explicit cultural antagonisms persisting into the present).⁴ According to Weil, force is primarily ontological, a root condition of embodied existence, and as such, a source of generic operations that apply to all beings, beings who share with one another a necessary subjection to

³ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge, 2002), 3.

⁴ See Simone Weil, *The Iliad or The Poem of Force*, trans. Mary McCarthy (Wallingford, Penn.: Pendle Hill, 1956).

matter, the attendant vulnerability of their bodies and minds, and the permanent threat of violence as constitutive of human relations: “Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man’s flesh shrinks away.”⁵ Political, economic, and social practices, inasmuch as they are constituted by and saturated with material force, turn subjects into the *subjected* through processes of reification: “Force is that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing.”⁶ However, the force of force itself is not absolute; there is “something in us which lies completely outside the range of relationships of force, which does not touch force and is not touched by force.”⁷ According to Weil, that which lies outside relations of force in the human being—outside the human being as subjected to matter—has its source in divine grace, which in turn opens a field of counterpractices to force as domination. Practices or modes of relating to others—for Weil, in a manner commensurate with grace, love, and justice—depend on the immaterial potentiality in the human soul capable of counteracting processes of reification: the human outside the pull of gravity.

Weil explains mechanisms of subjectification (technological, capitalist, imperialist, colonialist) through the development of a theologically inflected nature-philosophical politics of force. The attempt to think human relationality as inextricably and perhaps tragically conditioned by force is not new to Weil; indeed, this very question takes shape with particular intensity in Romantic literature and thought. If Weil construes matter univocally as subject to gravity, Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, in the *On the World Soul*, grasps matter as bifurcated, equally conditioned by light (the expansive force that overcomes boundaries) as it is by gravity (the contractive force that produces differentiation). If, as Weil would later assume, the primary and most immediate concept of force culminates in the conditioning of people—much in the same way humans attempt to condition animals—the Romantic concept of force poses a different question: what are the available cultural resources for *unconditioning* beings, political regimes, and frameworks of intelligibility, and how can such resources render conditions and processes of conditioning contingent and malleable, thereby constituting a space for the purpose of reimagining the human being and its manifold relations?

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3. See also Roberto Esposito, *The Origin of the Political: Hannah Arendt or Simone Weil*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Gareth Williams (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 45.

⁷ Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, vol. 2, trans. Arthur Wills (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1956), 457.

The works of Hemsterhuis contribute to this task by articulating a paradigm of *ecstatic* force. The ecstasy of force is commensurate with, indeed constitutes the very essence of a form of ethical agency that is simultaneously universalizing and deeply alienating inasmuch as it produces subjects that potentially stand outside of given frameworks of intelligibility as paragons of moral achievement.⁸ This paper will examine two divergent and productive responses to Hemsterhuis' account of ecstatic force: on the one hand, *redirected force*, here represented by Herder's and Goethe's reinterpretation of Hemsterhuis, both of whom seek to channel the form-dissolving potential of force into appropriate and stabilizing collective forms; and on the other hand, *unconditioning force*, represented by Friedrich Schiller (before his encounter with Kant) and Karoline von Günderrode, in which tendencies toward disindividuation are directed against hegemonic and hierarchizing political forms.

2. Ecstatic Force: François Hemsterhuis

What follows does not attempt to provide a synoptic and comprehensive view of Hemsterhuis' concept of force. Rather, I draw attention to certain tendencies in Hemsterhuis' account of force inasmuch as they provide a springboard for ethical and political thought experiments: both in Hemsterhuis' own writings, but also inasmuch as they stimulate further reflection and experimentation by subsequent authors, in emulation or through resistance. These postulates approach the concept of force only insofar as it is invested with a power to analyze and reconfigure relations (*rappports*), which is the most foundational concept of Hemsterhuis' work: relations to oneself, relations to others, relations to objects, and relations to the cosmos as the totality of all that is.

a) Postulate I: Force is desire

This postulate—force is desire—is provocatively expressed. More accurately, Hemsterhuis describes the relation between physical (Newtonian) force and the immaterial desire of the soul as one of analogy. Nevertheless, Hemsterhuis' thought contributes to a speculative thrust moving toward the identification of force and desire. In the “Letter on Desires,” Hemsterhuis draws attention to a property of the soul that he considers to be “analogous

⁸ For this reason, Daniel Whistler calls Hemsterhuis an “untimely” philosopher; his ideal demands a “universal affinity to all times” that can paradoxically produce an “absolute untimeliness” within one's own historical moment. Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 56.

to the attractive force that we constantly observe in what we call matter.” (*EE* 1.79)⁹ Just as matter attracts, so does the soul desire. The aim of desire is ecstatic inasmuch as it seeks self-transcendence, complete oneness, without remainder; according to Hemsterhuis, desire seeks “the most intimate and perfect union of its essence with that of the desired object.” (*EE* 1.80) The primary interface of the human being with the world, in all of its manifold practices and attitudes, is fusional.

Fusion comes to infiltrate every possible domain of human experience; in art, in sculptural form, in all forms of social interaction, humans seek fusion in their relations to that which surrounds them. Those who observe a beautiful statue thus do not grasp the object as an analog of the rational cosmos (as Baumgarten, the father of aesthetics, would); they do not care about the rules that make this object beautiful or not; they do not care about judging the work of art, or the free play of faculties, as Kant would have it (indeed, Kant was at pains to distinguish the disinterested or contemplative nature of aesthetic experience and the consuming drive of desire); nor would viewers grasp the work of art as an embodiment of shared values or that which makes sensible something intelligible (as would Hegel). For Hemsterhuis, aesthetic experience presupposes a subject who desires to become one with the totality of the object in all of its complexity. This fusional tendency is not limited to art, although Hemsterhuis wrote about this tendency as particularly pertinent to sculpture. Rather, it comes to animate all fields, including the social and political field as well. This analogization of force and desire invokes, or produces, a concept of the human being whose primary drive consists in seeking out relations that maximize possibilities for fusion.¹⁰

b) Postulate II: The blockage of attractions (*Anziehungen*) generates relations (*Beziehungen*)

The drive toward fusion posits a goal that cannot be realized; in a formulation that is significant for the German Romantics, Hemsterhuis describes the movement of desire as “the hyperbola with its asymptote,” (*EE* 1.87)¹¹ or the striving for an ideal not as achieved or achievable, but only as a second-order infinity of desire generated precisely by the structural lack of the ideal. The

⁹ On the citation of Hemsterhuis’s published work using the Edinburgh Edition, see the editor’s introduction to this special issue.

¹⁰ See Daniel Whistler, “The Discipline of Pious Reason: Goethe, Herder, Kant,” *Moral Powers, Fragile Beliefs: Essays in Moral and Religious Philosophy*, eds. Joseph Carlisle, James Carter, Daniel Whistler (New York: Continuum, 2011), 63.

¹¹ This motif was the subject of an important book by Manfred Frank on Early German Romanticism (although Hemsterhuis was not the focus of this work), see “*Unendliche Annäherung*”: *Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997).

failure to achieve a local union with the desired object does not constitute a failure from a systemic or global point of view; on the contrary, this failure is the very condition of differentiation, of life. The non-coincidence between the soul and its objects of desire transforms attractions into relations, *Anziehungen* into *Beziehungen* (*rappports*).

The desire for relations, as a second-order form of desire, thus comes to supplant, or at least supplement, the desire for the object itself. The realization of this second-order desire demands a maximization of relations and the development of strategies and techniques aiming at this maximization. Desire becomes invested with a world-altering charge; the world must be organized such that the possibilities for generating relations are themselves maximized. Underlying this imperative is a presupposition that homogeneity—or the close homologous fit between desire and object—best maximizes relations, as the homogeneous object comes closest to realizing unity with the soul. Hemsterhuis' project of world alteration consists “in making the desired object more homogeneous, and in making it more perceptible to us from a greater number of viewpoints – that is, in increasing the possibility of the desired union.” (*EE* 1.83) One consequence of this imperative is that the desire for union dialectically turns into its opposite, becoming a multiplicity generator. Paradoxically, the desire to eliminate difference *produces* the proliferation of differences.

The dynamics of desire described above form the foundation of a complete rethinking of the structure of human society and political organization: collective forms must be so organized such that human beings can maximize relations in the movement of their souls. The key concept—which describes a cognitive capacity, but equally applies to that of a social or political order—is that of *coexistence*. The blockage of desire produces not just the multiplication of ideas, but the simultaneous coexistence of ideas, or as Hemsterhuis writes: “absolutely perfect intelligence could, in the full force of the term, make many ideas coexist.” (*EE* 1.91) Hemsterhuis' concept of force thus culminates in an ethical and political imperative: develop that ethical and political subjectivity capable of making as many ideas coexist as possible. However, another question arises. What is that political form, or more properly, what are the ethical and political subjectivities that would generate as many relations as possible together *with* beings who are themselves heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous? Hemsterhuis' analogization of force and desire—the central operation of which consists in modulating the interaction of attractions and beings in order to maximize coexistent relations—poses a question to which contemporary thinkers are still trying to

find a response,¹² namely: how can one reconcile law and desire, or what form of social and political organization would be most adequate to the operations of desire if its singular goal is to maximize opportunities for fusion and relation? For example, in the dialogue *Alexis II*, a sequel to his famous dialogue on the Golden Age, Hemsterhuis (through the character of Diocles) draws upon the primacy of fusional desire to de-naturalize war, making armed conflict into a contingent practice rather than a natural law. At the same time, force facilitates the emergence of localized groups of relatively homogeneous beings as strategic agglomerations of fusional desire—in friendship or nationality, for example (although such a dynamic could extend across all relations predicated upon solidarity).

c) Postulate III: The maximization of relations demands ethical and political reform

The blockage of desire and the generation of relations from attractions establishes an ethical and political field with its specific set of problems. The first problem can be described as that of the political subject itself; the second encompasses that of the form of collective—whether a state, a religion, a culture (nation), or some other form—with a view to its capacity to facilitate or inhibit the maximization of attractive force. Regarding the first problem, Hemsterhuis argues that maximizing one’s attractive force requires developing organs specific to individual beings. Just as sight can be trained to perceive more and diverse relations in that which is seen, so too can the soul be trained to perceive more and diverse ideal relations between beings. Such is the function of the organ Hemsterhuis calls the “moral organ,” or that organ through which the soul perceives cosmological and moral order. Perceptions through this organ can attain the pinnacle of relation-maximizing desire, as the cosmos itself designates that superobject capable of generating as many coexistent ideas in the finite space of the soul as possible. According to Hemsterhuis, the development of the moral organ could resolve the—only apparent—conflict between law and desire, or as Kant would express it, between duty and inclination. Hemsterhuis’ regime of training and its specific form of organ mediation develops a *cosmoerotic* programme (to draw upon but also displace the *cosmotechnics* of Yuk Hui).¹³ The cosmoerotics of the moral organ constitutes the precondition for the development of an ethical and political subjectivity and their corresponding collective forms (it

¹² See, for example, Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London, New York: Verso, 2012).

¹³ See Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2016), 19-20.

is hard to understate the importance of this doctrine for the German Romantic political imagination; for example, one can find traces of this cosmoerotics in Schleiermacher's conception of religion as an intuition of the universe, which also produces operations of collectivization).

Modern legislation and statecraft, instead of enabling the maximization of desire by facilitating the unity of subjects with the superobject cosmos, and by extension, with one another, impede or suppress this potential. Hemsterhuis laments that law, as a substitute organ, "[has] replaced the moral organ." (*EE* 1.113)¹⁴ One may detect a subtly anarchistic strand in Hemsterhuis' thought, at least in respect to the moderns who are over-dependent on the state for their moral code and forced operations of unification. A certain type of stoic, for example, does not depend upon the laws of the state to harmonize with the universal order of the cosmos (even though, following Marcus Aurelius, they would organize the state according to this order): such a stoic trains the soul *and* shapes an ethical-political order at one and the same time. Whereas subjects in antiquity had a more fully developed moral organ and thus were more able to perceive the manifold relations in the superobject cosmos and the moral order resulting from these relations, the state and legislative processes of modernity began constructing relations *for* subjects, thus taking over the tasks—and ecstasies—of cognition. The moral organ atrophied in the transition from antiquity to modernity.

Some consequences follow from these postulates. First, the blockage of desire is generative; only because desire remains unfulfilled can an attraction become a source of relations. The imperative of force aims at maximization: to maintain desire in a state of dynamic movement such that as many relations as possible can be cognized as quickly as possible (again, desire and cognition are not oppositional). Second, the ethical and political problem of modernity cannot be solved solely by means of state forms, but requires the cultivation of an ethical and political training or practice that recognizes heterogeneity while at the same time seeking out zones of homogeneity among others, where "others" are to be taken as capaciously as possible (human beings, aesthetic objects, the superobject "cosmos"). Homogeneous structures shared between beings become erogenous zones. The soul, which seeks out such homogeneities, thus constitutes the ultimate erogenous zone—one in which desire becomes commensurate with ethical duty and political order. Third, the training of the moral organ, as that organ capable of perceiving ideal relations, can theoretically coexist with the state, as it did in antiquity (the state even helped train the moral organ in antiquity,

¹⁴ See Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*, 225-26.

according to Hemsterhuis). However, the moral organ also enables a subject to stand out from a collective, to enter into explicit and dramatic conflict with a given symbolic order. Hemsterhuis draws on the example of Brutus to illustrate this point—an example that will become particularly important for Günderrode:

In killing Caesar, Brutus committed a crime in the eyes of the people, and perhaps vis-à-vis society; but in the soul of Brutus this action no doubt conformed to the eternal order. (*EE* 1.112)

The soul operates in this instance in excess of the shared normative commitments in a given time and place, occupying a position of non-identity with respect to the dominant symbolic order. Hemsterhuis' ethics and politics of force thus culminate in a regime of exercise rather than in a state, a training of the organ of the soul or the moral organ capable of suspending the collective beliefs and social and political norms of its age. There are thus at least two senses in which force can be said to be ecstatic for Hemsterhuis. First, the movement of the soul analogous to attraction in matter tends toward a union with objects of desire, from the work of art to the superobject cosmos, thereby establishing a cosmoerotic regime that aims to dissolve the self—the self as situated and embodied in time and space—since it seeks to unify itself with the eternity of all things. And second, the multiplication of relations that emerges from the frustration of this desire nevertheless enables a subject to “stand out” of its time and place, thus becoming an ecstatic subject, not in its dissolution, but in the idiosyncratic manner in which it inhabits and perceives cosmological order.

2. Redirected Force: Herder

Hemsterhuis' ethics and politics of force is likely to elicit a certain discomfort, perhaps due its universalism, perhaps due its dependence on the categories of homogeneity and heterogeneity, perhaps due its desire for fusion, which entails its own sort of violence. Such was the case for Johann Gottfried Herder, who found himself equally attracted to and repelled by Hemsterhuis' thought. Herder, like Hemsterhuis, sought to analogize matter and mind through the concept of force, and like Hemsterhuis, he claimed that such operations were critical to the development of the capacities of the soul. He was, however, no ecstatic thinker; any form-dissolving potential inherent in the concept of force had to be met with a countertendency, something that would assure the integrity of the individual. Unlike Hemsterhuis, Herder developed an agonistic concept of force, a notion of repulsion *opposed to*

attraction, according to the laws of polarity; for Hemsterhuis, individuation takes place not because of opposing forces, but because of the internal heterogeneity intrinsic to the composition of bodies, a compositional form that in turn inhibits fusional processes. Hemsterhuis designates this excess generated by compositional impediments to attraction as “inertia,” which in turn secures the possibility of freedom and ethical agency. In contrast to Hemsterhuis, Herder develops a different ethics and politics of force, partially in response to the dangers of ecstasis in Hemsterhuis’ thought.

Christoph Menke has recently associated Herder with a *poetic*—and non-normative—concept of force, one disclosed in the activity of the genius who has an immediate contact with nature, who expresses their self along with the totality of nature from a dark and obscure ground in the soul.¹⁵ But there is another concept of force—just as equally poetic, albeit irreducible to subjectivity—that Herder claims can ground ethical and political ways of being in the world. As we shall see, this concept of force enables democratic forms of relationality.

Herder’s essay “Love and Selfhood” responds to Hemsterhuis’ fusional account of desire by inscribing the univocity of force as attraction into a dual and oppositional structure: love (oriented towards others) and selfhood (oriented towards the self). In this essay and in others around this time, Herder does not simply construe force as an obscure, non-normative source for creative self-poiesis. On the contrary, Herder initiates an inquiry into social and political forms adequate to his particular conception of force as a basic ontological structure of existence. First, Herder begins, like Hemsterhuis, by analogizing force in the physical universe and the movements of the soul; unlike Hemsterhuis, he sees force in the universe not as that which draws human beings towards fusion, that is, not primarily as attraction, but as a source of struggle and conflict as well, as attraction *and* repulsion. To Hemsterhuis’ *ecstatic* force, then, Herder posits *agonistic* force. The irreducibly oppositional structure of force drifts into a naturalization of violence (thereby contributing to the strand of nature-philosophical politics that would later be taken up by Weil). In “On the Sense of Feeling,” Herder writes: “in the universe all is attraction and repulsion and therefore violence.”¹⁶ Force thus posits an ineliminable potential for conflict as part of the structure of reality. Such is one limit point or danger that Herder grasps

¹⁵ See Christoph Menke, *Kraft: Ein Grundbegriff ästhetischer Anthropologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2017).

¹⁶ Johann Gottfried Herder, “Zum Sinn des Gefühls,” *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Bd. 4, *Schriften zu Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Altertum 1774 – 1787*, eds. Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 235-243, 239.

as part of the dynamic of force to which human beings must craft a response: given that the structure of the real is internally inconsistent, in opposition to itself, how can one find forms in which the violence of oppositional forces can coexist with human thriving?

Another danger for Herder lies precisely in Hemsterhuis' definition of desire as the yearning for fusion, and here the danger is twofold. First, as pure fulfillment of a drive, desire destroys its object: Herder remarks, "also here, enjoyment is *unification*,"¹⁷ but "now the object is consumed, destroyed."¹⁸ The second danger of fusional desire refers not to the destruction of the object, but to that of the subject, namely, in mystical or ecstatic limit experiences, a yearning for God in which "I would lose myself in God without any further feeling and consciousness of myself."¹⁹

The challenge Herder seeks to meet is the following: given this double danger of force—force as the naturalization of violence and conflict, on the one hand, and force as that which would destroy the integrity of the subject or the object, on the other hand—are there sustainable forms of sociability and communication that would nevertheless be commensurate with the forces of attraction and repulsion? To meet this challenge, Herder develops an organization of desire capable of resisting the destructive tendencies of force without denying the ever-present dynamics of force as a necessary ontological background of all forms of social and political organization. He develops a concept of force that is rooted neither in the desire of the subject nor in the dark ground of the soul, but rather, as a regulatory force that moves *between* bodies and governs the distances between subjects:

As soon as many creatures exist mildly next to one another, and want to enjoy one another, it thus follows that no one of these creatures can take its point of departure from its own pleasure, that is, from the *highest pleasure*, or it will destroy everything around it. It has to give and take, suffer and act, attract to itself and gently impart from itself.²⁰

If force has to maintain a system in a state of dynamic equilibrium constituted by polarity, attracting and repelling as needed, then friendship (*philia*) rather than love (*eros*) becomes primordial with respect to cosmic order.²¹ The ontological primordality of *philia* also functions as the basic interrelational

¹⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, "Liebe und Selbstheit," *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Bd. 4, *Schriften zu Philosophie, Literatur, Kunst und Altertum 1774 – 1787*, eds. Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1994), 405-425; 409.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 419.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

²¹ See Whistler, "The Discipline of Pious Reason."

model for a democratic and non-hierarchical horizontality (*nebeneinander*). Force is thus reinterpreted *as* the ground of a specific ethical and political order predicated on differentiation rather than on the elimination of differentiation. Central to this model are the phenomena of distance and degree (or degrees of difference), which become the precondition for multiplicity and coexistence; the structure of the world, the godhood, has “posited so many forms of distances, with such different degrees and varieties of attractive force”²² [so mancherlei *Entfernungen* gesetzt, mit so verschiedenen *Graden* und *Arten* der Anziehungskraft]. Herder thus redirects desire from objects to distances between objects; if distance makes multiplicity possible, then distance becomes the real object of desire.

More radically, however, the ontology of forces calls into question the very idea of an *object of* desire as ontologically primordial; instead of an object of desire, there is a process of desire, and in turn, the distance necessary to keep the process in a state of perpetual activity. Unlike Hemsterhuis, for whom desire aims at unification with every object through the superobject cosmos and the cosmoerotics of the moral organ, Herder develops an account of desire that takes the perspective of the cosmos itself, which desires not objects, but the processes through which objects self-organize and realize their individual potentialities. This second-order systemic form of desire—which desires the attraction-repulsion dynamic itself rather than the object—generates in turn an ethics and politics of friendship: a free-flowing reciprocation of desire between discrete individuals that never comes to an end precisely because it desires the gap between itself and its others. Herder’s *redirected* force—force redirected to desiring its own non-fulfillment, the distance between itself and its objects—forms the foundation for a democratic model of multiplicity and relationality.

3. The Force of Unconditioning Objects: Goethe

Goethe develops key aesthetic, philosophical, and natural scientific concepts in dialogue with Herder in the 1770s: genius, development (*Bildung*), polarity, holism, monism, cultural difference, among others. Particularly important for Goethe is Herder’s reinterpretation of Spinoza in *God: Some Conversations* (1787), undertaken in the wake of Jacobi’s *Letters on the Doctrine of Spinoza* (1785). In *God: Some Conversations*, Herder emends Spinoza’s monist and immanent ontology of nature by supplanting the mechanistic notion of substance with a dynamic concept of force—an interpretation that

²² Herder, “Liebe und Selbstheit,” 408.

was also taken up and developed by Romantic nature-philosophical thought in the works of Schelling, Novalis, Günderrode, and Friedrich Schlegel, among others. While Goethe integrates aspects of this interpretation of Spinoza into his own view of nature, for example, in his claims for the centrality of polarity (*Polarität*) and intensification (*Steigerung*) in the order of natural appearances, Goethe's tendency towards the concrete and his practice of "object-oriented thought" (*gegenständliches Denken*)²³ tended to approach force phenomenologically rather than ontologically. Given Goethe's object-oriented perspective, it should be no surprise that Goethe was one of the only thinkers—if not the only thinker of the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries—to substantially develop the aesthetic consequences of one of Hemsterhuis' most underappreciated texts: the *Letter on an Antique Gemstone*.

Hemsterhuis' earlier essayistic work concentrates on a series of letters: the *Letter on Sculpture*, the *Letter on Desires*, the *Letter on Man and his Relations*. The first text in eighteenth-century editions of his collected writings, *Letter on an Antique Gemstone*, in contrast to the other works, is generally held to have had little to no afterlife in the aesthetic tradition; it is often regarded as a quaint antiquarian piece. Not only is this assessment false, but Goethe—albeit implicitly—makes this particular letter into a foundational context for the development of a symbolic aesthetics of force in his *Campaign in France*, a text written 1819-1822 in which he narrates the disastrous retreat of allied forces from revolutionary France that took place in 1792. Long misrecognized as a mere autobiographical account of historical events, *Campaign in France* articulates (even performs) an aesthetic ontology that grasps history as the manifestation of form-dissolving and form-generating forces. If the centrality of the *Letter on an Antique Gemstone* to Goethe's aesthetic programme has not been acknowledged by the scholarship, it is perhaps because Goethe engages with the ideas of this text not through direct allusions to Hemsterhuis' letter, but through the engraved gemstones themselves. More importantly, engraved gemstones become counter-symbolic aesthetic objects in the context of Goethe's own reflections: in a field of contested symbolic forms, these objects function as a dispersed reserve of energy, as repositories of cultural memory, capable of countering

²³ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, eds. Hendrik Birus, Dieter Borchmeyer, Karl Eibl, et. al., 40 vols, vol. 36 (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987–2013), 318. Hereafter references to Goethe's works will be cited FA, followed by volume and page number.

the daemonic forces of history as they manifest themselves in the entropic and disintegrative effects of war and revolutionary destruction.²⁴

The *Campaign in France* undertakes nothing less than a morphology of historical reality, capturing the play of agonistic forces as they manifest themselves on the world stage. Goethe provides the key to this morphology of history at a critical moment in the narrative when, after the retreat, he travels to Münster to visit the social circle surrounding Amalie Gallitzin—an episode in which the memory of Hemsterhuis, who had died two years earlier in 1790, becomes ever more present and significant in the narrative arc of the text. He describes this morphological and phenomenological key to historical complexity by referring to Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*: “I had not failed to notice from Kant’s natural science that the force of attraction and repulsion belongs to the essence of matter and that one cannot be separated from the other in the concept of matter; from this observation occurred to me the originary polarity of all entities, a polarity that saturates and vitalizes the infinite multiplicity of appearances.”²⁵ The polarity of forces, as that which constitutes the field of appearances, posits a field of tension between the disindividuating effects of war, a mode of appearing that breaks down boundaries and tends toward formlessness, and the counter-force of preservation and sublimation that Goethe finds in the reifying potential of aesthetic objects. The primary representative of aesthetic potentiality—that is, of the specific force of the aesthetic, which counters the destructive force of disindividuation—can be found in the gemstones collected, categorized, analyzed, and left behind as a legacy, as the trace of a particular way of being in the world, by Hemsterhuis himself. Hemsterhuis’ gemstones—as figures of crystallization accruing historical sedimentation, melding formative processes drawn from nature and from art, inorganic form and technics—counter the destructive momentum of cultural and social disintegration with their cohesive and generative force. From this point of view, the *Campaign in France* tells the story of a struggle between two very different, and seemingly asymmetrical, symbolic objects: the cohesive and individuating force of the aesthetic as crystallized in gemstones on the one hand, and the dissolving and disindividuating force of the French Revolution on the other hand.

But what, precisely, is a symbolic object? In a famous letter to Schiller in August 1797, Goethe writes about special types of object that he calls

²⁴ I had the opportunity to read sections of a manuscript in preparation by Joel Lande entitled *Vagantenweisheit: Goethes Schaffen im Licht der Französischen Revolution*, in which he touches on similar themes; Lande reads Goethe as a “Phänomenologe gesellschaftlicher Umwälzungen” (forthcoming), an assessment with which I agree.

²⁵ FA 16.520.

“symbolic objects” (“*Gegenstände*, die eigentlich symbolisch sind”).²⁶ Symbolic objects produce multiple effects: they stand out from other objects, they are thus out-standing (“eminent cases”²⁷); they have a “characteristic multiplicity or variety”²⁸ (*charakteristische Mannigfaltigkeit*); as “representatives of many other objects,”²⁹ they *stand in* for other objects (standing out and standing in belong to the operations of symbolic objects); they produce a “certain totality”³⁰ (*eine gewisse Totalität*)—not a dogmatic or enumerated totality but a totality whose boundaries are not set in advance and are under negotiation; symbolic objects generate “a certain series”³¹ or succession (*eine gewisse Reihe*); they call forth “similarity and foreignness”³² (*ähnliches und fremdes*); they produce a “certain unity and generality”³³ (*Einheit und Allheit*). In perceptual, imaginative, and cognitive experience, symbolic objects stand out from others in their power to disclose something beyond themselves; Goethe calls them “happy” or “fortunate”³⁴ objects, *glücklich*, inasmuch as they produce in space what the *kairos* generates in time.

A further secondary effect not explicitly discussed in the letter to Schiller also plays a role in Goethe’s approach to symbolic objects: they produce a punctuation or articulation that introduces a caesura into the flow of temporally continuous experience. Symbolic objects open up a counter-space for imaginative practices that would otherwise not be granted a horizon of emergence. When they function in this way, symbolic objects become *unconditioning objects*. Unconditioning objects draw upon and expand the dynamics of symbolic objects in two ways: first, they are not merely sensuous representatives of the idea (i.e. the ideal form of the plant as a virtual source from which all other forms can be derived or imaginatively reproduced), but open up onto a more foundational ontology of becoming, what Goethe calls “the lawful living power”³⁵ (*das gesetzmäßig Lebendige*); and second, these objects are unconditioning inasmuch as they suspend the conditions governing a status quo and intimate a different order of things.

When considered as an autobiographical text, Goethe’s *Campaign in France*, along with the *Siege of Mainz*, purports to narrate the story of Goethe’s

²⁶ FA 31.389.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 546.

“whimsical military career” (*wunderliche Militairlaufbahn*).³⁶ Both texts document historical catastrophe: the political catastrophe of the military defeat and the siege of Mainz, but more broadly, the catastrophe of violence and war itself, of the entropic forces of history. Autobiographical interpretations of the *Campaign in France* tend to obscure the latent aesthetic-ontological drama running parallel to the more immediately visible historical and subjective catastrophe. This other drama unfolds in the contemplation of different types of symbolic objects: unconditioning objects produced by and intervening within force dynamics.

In a first step, then, this supposedly autobiographical text, which on the surface aims to construct the persona *Goethe*, can be turned on its head: it evinces another aspect, not so much as a subject-centered text, but as one that cultivates an attentiveness to objects that disclose the fundamental forces governing appearances. Second, the object attractions in this text track relatively closely to the political-existential situation in which the narrator finds himself; Goethe’s fascination with objects indexes the agonistic domain of social and political reality, what Goethe characterizes as “the inner antagonism of the citizens,”³⁷ riven by class and national conflicts, constantly brushing up against the persistence of an apparent death drive. However, if the tendency toward dissolution constitutes one of the central features of Goethe’s unconditioning objects—thereby indexing divisions in various social bodies and collective formations—a second tendency within these objects draws upon a counter-force, namely, that which could repair such seemingly ineluctable antagonisms.

This internal object dynamic—disclosing antagonisms and then repairing them—mirrors the narrative of arc of the *Campaign* itself. If Goethe, over the course of the narrative, encounters war as a symbolic object in its own right, as a source of historical entropy that turns against the cohesiveness of things and subjects all beings to contingency and vulnerability, Goethe eventually retreats from the destabilization of the unconditioning object of war into a confined and controlled domestic and social space at the end of the text. In this seemingly closed-off space (an aesthetic counter-space not unlike Schiller’s conception of the chorus in *The Bride of Messina*, which draws a wall around reality not only to protect itself from the real, but to unlock the autonomous power of the aesthetic in relation *to* this reality), he is drawn toward objects that illustrate the possibility of a binding force to counter the “internal discord”³⁸ (*der innere Zwiespalt*) of revolutionary disintegration. He

³⁶ FA 36.250.

³⁷ FA 16.395.

³⁸ Ibid.

discovers the symbolic paradigm of this other sort of object towards the end of the narrative among the social circle in Münster surrounding Amalie Gallitzin. It is at this moment that Goethe's *Campaign*, in its crowning final section, undertakes an aesthetic resuscitation and reinterpretation of Hemsterhuis' philosophy.

This aesthetic resuscitation harnesses a power within aesthetic objects to channel and redirect the ontology of force that Goethe develops in other contexts. In his *Theory of Colors*, Goethe approaches nature as constituted by forces of polarity that initiate operations of dividing and uniting: "To divide that which is united, to unite that which is divided, is the life of nature; this is the eternal systole and diastole, the eternal synchysis and diachysis, the inhaling and exhaling of the world in which we live, weave, and exist."³⁹ Goethe treats war in the *Campaign in France* as a symbolic and morphological object revelatory of this pulsing rhythm within the grain of historical reality. War, and the French Revolution more specifically, constitutes a morphological challenge; the *Campaign* undertakes a morphology of war presented from the perspective of the physicist, albeit with an important inversion, one in which the oscillating pulsation of things produces ruin rather than life. The observation of objects plundered from a weapons cache launches Goethe into a rumination on the alternation "between order and disorder, between survival and perishing, between stealing and paying... that probably makes war so ruinous for the mind."⁴⁰ The general tendencies of the objects Goethe observes throughout the narrative brings them into a horizon of contemporaneity where they are drawn into the maelstrom of war: any redemptive potential they hold to indicate a different order of things comes under assault by the conditions of violence, conflict and pessimism that suffuse the present.

The transfiguration of objects under the aspect of disintegration continues throughout the narrative, making objects resistant to the morphological gaze. Things begin to lose their integrity *as* objects, since the conditions of war—operating in tandem with disastrous weather—render fragile not just political or national boundaries, but the boundedness of all appearances, in a more concrete sense overwhelming them with the amorphous presence of dirt, mud, and rain.⁴¹ The universalization of war ultimately entails the destruction of all object-archives, objects as archives,

³⁹ FA 23: 239.

⁴⁰ FA 16.413.

⁴¹ See Hans Blumenberg, *Goethe zum Beispiel* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1999), 153. My thanks go to Joel Lande for the reference to Blumenberg; Lande also writes of this tendency of the text to disintegrate into mud in his forthcoming manuscript.

repositories of personal and culturally bound values, or in a larger sense, art. Previously, in a 1772 review of Georg Sulzer's *Theory of the Fine Arts*, Goethe approached creative-destructive tendencies through the semantics of force (*Kraft*): "What we see of nature is force that consumes force, nothing lasting, everything transient, a thousand germs destroyed, every moment a thousand born, grand and significant, infinitely diverse; beautiful and ugly, good and evil, everything existing side by side with equal right. And *art* is precisely the counterpart to this; it emerges from the efforts of the individual to maintain itself against the destructive force of the whole."⁴² The turn toward objects—and above all to aesthetic objects—can, from this perspective, be regarded as a counterforce, a force that asserts itself against the leveling operations of anarchic, disintegratory force.

The ending of the *Campaign in France* turns to the aesthetic object in a gesture of withdrawal: a military retreat, to be sure, but also a retreat from the political-public sphere of world-historical events into the domestic sphere. The retreat from publicity, the turn toward the interior, is indicated by the final line of the *Campaign*, part of an occasional poem, which reads: "we turn, regardless of how the world captivates / To the confines of limitation, which alone grants happiness" [*wir wenden uns, wie auch die Welt entzücke, / Der Enge zu, die uns allein beglücke*].⁴³ In this inward retreat, Goethe seeks to re-establish the stabilization of a bounded concept of the real after his encounter with the oscillating conditions of war. However, Goethe does not retreat from sociality as such; instead, by turning to the interiority of domestic stability, he discovers an alternative logic of social order.

This alternative logic binds individuals together in their dedication to the perception and interpretation of sensuous objects. The end of the *Campaign* describes how an aesthetic community gathers around the cut gemstones that Hemsterhuis left to Gallitzin upon his death. Goethe describes these gemstones with some detail at various moments; in another text, written shortly after he wrote *Campaign in France*, Goethe claims that the collection of stones formed the "the spiritual-aesthetic midpoint around which friends united for several days—friends, by the way, whose thinking and feeling did not quite harmonize."⁴⁴ The gemstone, in this account, constitutes a theoretical object—that is, an object that brings the potential abstraction and disembodiment of theory into sensuous presence—inasmuch

⁴² FA 18.197.

⁴³ FA 16.572.

⁴⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Hemsterhuis-Gallizinische Gemmen-Sammlung," *Goethes Werke*, part 2, vol. 49 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1900), 101.

as it is folded into a series of explicit reinterpretations of Hemsterhuis' texts, which Goethe undertakes in the *Campaign*.

Goethe's analysis of Hemsterhuis' thought follows a triadic structure, beginning with Hemsterhuis' *Letter on Sculpture*, moving to the *Letter on Desires*, and finally culminating in the gemstones themselves as symbolic-theoretical objects. Goethe takes his point of departure from a dynamic interpretation of Hemsterhuis' notion of the beautiful, which Hemsterhuis formulates in the *Letter on Sculpture* as the production of the greatest number of ideas in the smallest amount of time. For Goethe, what Hemsterhuis describes as the law of the *optimum* is rooted in a vitalized and organized natural source, "the lawful living power" (*das gesetzmäßig Lebendige*); beauty sensuously mediates and intensifies this source, channeling a living dynamic that reproduces itself in subjects: "The beautiful is that through which—whenever we have a vision of the lawful living power in its greatest activity and perfection—we are stimulated to reproduce this dynamic and thereby feel ourselves equally vitalized and set into the highest form of activity."⁴⁵ He claims that this formulation and Hemsterhuis' law of the optimum say "exactly the same thing, only expressed by two different human beings."⁴⁶ In this redescription and reinterpretation of Hemsterhuis' principle of the optimum, the beautiful is no longer limited to the domain of art, but extends to encompass all living processes. Important for Goethe is the vitalizing gesture implicit in Hemsterhuis' thought: the beautiful inasmuch as it makes visible a perpetually generative dynamic in which the viewer actively participates and then reproduces onward.

Goethe continues his review of Hemsterhuis' thought with a brief aside on Hemsterhuis' *Letter on Desires*, which complicates the presentation of the beautiful as a "lawful living force" by introducing a gap between the subject and its desired unification with objects. Here too, however, the potential rift or gap between subject and object is transformed into a reproductive drive; this gap animates the absolute operation of *striving*, itself predicated on the incapacity to achieve wholeness or completion. This figure reappears in post-Kantian speculative thought, for example, as a central dynamic of stimulation in Fichte's notion of subjectivity as perpetual self-positing activity (the notable literary analog of which can be found in the striving of Faust). In Goethe's account of Hemsterhuis' *Letter on Desires*, desire can be animated, personified, and approached as if it were itself the partner in an erotic relationship; the pulsation of desire animates the very rhetoric of desire.

⁴⁵ FA 16.546.

⁴⁶ FA 16.546.

Goethe writes: “Desire and satisfaction [have to] alternate in a pulsating life, grabbing hold of one another and letting one another go... so that one should not stop desiring.”⁴⁷

While it might seem that Goethe ends his discussion of Hemsterhuis with this brief remark on the *Letter on Desires*, in fact, the engraved gems, standing in as a proxy for Goethe’s own concept of an aesthetic or symbolic object, constitute the final step in his explication of Hemsterhuis’ thought. Goethe moves from the reproduction of “the lawful living power” to the reproduction of desire that desires itself, to the final step in the sequence, the capstone, as it were: it is only through the engraved gems that the *sociality* of the aesthetic comes to light, the aesthetic as a way of being in the world that confronts and repairs the fissures of an agonistic ontological dynamic. Goethe describes “the cut stones as a magnificent mediating member” that can fill the gaps of social interaction and conversation [*Unterhaltung*], “whenever interaction threatens to become intermittent [*lückenhaft*].”⁴⁸ However, the cut stones produce much more than conversation or entertainment; rather, they represent the sensuous culmination of the dynamics that Goethe discusses in Hemsterhuis’ theory of beauty and desire, albeit now raised to the level of sociality.

To grasp how this happens and why the gemstone constitutes a *theoretical object*, it is necessary to briefly turn to Hemsterhuis’ *Letter on an Antique Gemstone*, which hovers over this section of the *Campaign* although it is never explicitly mentioned. There is a record that Goethe read the letter and called it “significant,”⁴⁹ but his precise knowledge of the letter is not known, so what follows is partially speculative.

The particular gemstone analyzed by Hemsterhuis in his letter represents an aesthetic and an ethical ideal of feminine agency—albeit a form of agency, as is so often the case, directed to repairing unchecked masculinity. Hemsterhuis describes the gemstone in the letter as follows:

If you look carefully at the main figure, you will notice that it is that of a woman. The delicacy of her physiognomy, the part of the bosom spared by the gleam of the amethyst, and those long tresses floating in the air or running down her back, they all dispel any doubt. Her head is surrounded by a diadem, and what must be noted is that she is not in the attitude of a person who wants to ride the horse, but in [the attitude] of a person who wants to restrain it: the position of her legs proves this sufficiently. And indeed, she does not only tighten the reins, but the

⁴⁷ FA 16.547.

⁴⁸ FA 16.549.

⁴⁹ Goethe, “Hemsterhuis-Gallizinische Gemmen-Sammlung,” 109.

animal itself rears up and seems to struggle against the hand that restrains it. (*EE* 1.56)

Just as Freud would later uncover visible traces of invisible psychological processes of sublimation in his *Moses of Michelangelo*, so too does Hemsterhuis turn to an object whose main function intends to memorialize the mastering of instinctuality and channel this achievement into the fabric of social and political order. Via a series of philological analyses that purport to uncover the identity of this figure, Hemsterhuis argues that the gemstone was a *δαμαρέτιον*, a coin or medal to memorialize Damarete of Sicily from Greek antiquity. The husband of Damarete, Gelon, tyrant of Syracuse, defeated the Carthaginians and was on the verge of laying waste to the land; the Carthaginians turned to his wife, Damarate, for help, who, in the words of Hemsterhuis, “was so successful with her husband that she managed to calm [the tyrant] and persuade him to make peace with the Carthaginians with terms that were quite favourable considering the circumstances in which they found themselves.” (*EE* 1.57) The horse straining against its bridle, the tyrant straining to press on to conquer: a series of symbolic substitutions—from the horse to the tyrant to the politics of domination—makes the gemstone into a chain of sublimating operations directed against the sheer expression of destructive drive. The gemstone as aesthetic object captures the generation of ethical and political equilibrium in a material and transhistorical archive itself invested with a stabilizing symbolic power. In this chain of representations, Hemsterhuis’ gemstone thematizes and turns against a politics of force conceptualized as brute domination. Such is the power of the work of art as described in Hemsterhuis’ *Letter on an Antique Gemstone*.

This operation carries over into Goethe’s *Campaign*, for which Hemsterhuis’ gemstones function as an aesthetic model. The circle in Münster in Goethe’s account, coming at the end of a retreat from the contingencies of war into an aesthetically constituted social space, displays and discusses multiple gemstones left behind by Hemsterhuis, and here too, a process of symbolic sublimation is enacted, albeit in a smaller format. When Goethe appears in Münster, he encounters a community with its own particular tensions, a community that does not seem to admit his own heterodox personality into its circle; and here too, the gemstone repairs this potentially fractured collective body. For Goethe, the object agency of the gemstone thereby produces a counter-tendency to the disintegrative manifestations of force. If war unconditions the stabilizing conditions of life through exposure to conflict, contingency, and forces of disindividuation, the

gemstone reimposes boundaries and boundedness, cohesion, and ultimately becomes a reservoir for life operations. Such operations are preserved in an archive transcending mortality, as the entire culture of antiquity and modernity, from Damarete to Hemsterhuis himself, still “works” through these gemstones; they mediate life amidst the facticity of death. The unconditioning operation of war must itself be unconditioned, suspended *as* a condition. And such is, moreover, the trajectory of the narrative arc of the *Campaign in France* as well, whose symbolic agency channels and duplicates that of Hemsterhuis’ gemstone. The reproduction of this aesthetic form (from gemstone to text) at the same time suggests a reading of this text—over and above its autobiographical functions—not just as a repository for unconditioning symbolic objects, but itself as an example of such a reparative aesthetic object.

4. Unconditioning Force: Schiller and Günderröde

Already in Hemsterhuis’ thought, the ontology of force, when manifesting itself as desire in mental—simultaneously erotic and cognitive—operations that aim at perfect identification with an object, exhibits a tendency toward the elimination of distinctions. As both Goethe and Herder note, absolute erotic identification defeats its purported generative function—in what the Hegelian tradition would call a dialectical inversion—by becoming commensurate with a destructive, disindividuating force (Goethe’s *Werther* is, in many senses, a case study in the commensurability of erotic identification and disindividuation, eros and thanatos). Both Goethe and Herder are thus concerned to elicit a counter-force in objects and practices capable of re-establishing boundaries. When confronted with the unruly drive toward disintegration that manifests itself in war, Goethe constructs an aesthetic archive that preserves operations of sublimation in a morphological train of transmission—effectively substituting the morphologies (or anti-morphologies) of dissolution in war with the morphologies of form-maintenance and form-generation in art—whereas Herder transforms the desire for objects or subjects into the desire *for* distance; the distance between beings becomes a second-order object of desire.

Herder formulates one of the guiding questions for ontologies of force: what are the mechanisms that hold beings at a distance? In another text around this time that takes its point of departure from an ontology of force, *Observations about the Universe* (1787), Karl Theodor von Dalberg imagines a utopia of human beings held together by attraction, a field in which all beings

participate in a perpetual “becoming similar” (*Ähnlichwerdung*).⁵⁰ Dalberg nevertheless reconciles force with distinctions: “class, sex, species, always the same, after millennia the same!”⁵¹ Dalberg (who was later to become Schiller's patron) does not want to eliminate such distinctions—on the contrary, he claims these distinctions *manifest* the force of becoming-similar: people of the same class will continue belonging to the same class, thereby investing socially contingent categories with a natural cohesion or attractive force. By regarding class as a mechanism of separation that makes groups of human beings belong to a common genus—thereby cohering with the process of “becoming similar”—Dalberg illustrates how force can be used to naturalize class, gender, and other forms of social or cultural differentiation and hierarchization.

There are, however, other possible speculative engagements with the politics of force that take the idea of “becoming similar” in more radical directions. These other thought experiments with force make disindividuation into a central operation, one that even claims primacy over individuation (against Herder and Goethe). One of the most notable aesthetic explorations of the potential of force to affirm processes of disindividuation can be found in Schiller's *Philosophical Letters* in a section entitled the “Theosophy of Julius.” Laure Cahen-Maurel argues that this text, above all its nature-philosophical concept of love and beauty, is significant for Novalis' thought.⁵² Some of the most significant operations of Romantic thought experiments can already be found in this text. In the “Theosophy of Julius,” Schiller elaborates a vision of the cosmos so metaphysical, speculative, and religiously inflected, that the dialogue partners of this letter exchange (Julius and Raphael) speak of this vision as a form of non-sense (*Unsinn*).

Rather than reject this non-sense outright, the creator of this vision (Julius) amplifies it and makes it into an aesthetic construct, into a symbolic network imbued with an ontological and conceptual status through the autonomy of its system of signification. Julius claims, “our most pure concepts are in no way *images* of things, but rather, their necessarily determined and coexisting *signs*.”⁵³ Julius imagines an ontology of attraction that manifests its truth *as* an effect of attraction itself, that is, the attraction

⁵⁰ Karl Theodor von Dalberg, *Betrachtungen über das Universum* (Erfurt: Johann Friedrich Weber, 1777), 61.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵² See Laure Cahen-Maurel, “Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine,” *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 129-165, 155.

⁵³ Friedrich Schiller, *Philosophische Briefe, Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, Bd. 8: *Theoretische Schriften*, ed. Rolf-Peter Janz (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), 208–233, 209.

of its sign character, whose form of truth operates through conceptuality detached from external reference. He describes this ontology of attraction, which in turn must subtend all signifying practices (including his own discourse), as a process of individuation that tends toward disindividuation:

The attraction of elements brought the physical form of nature into being. The attraction of minds multiplied into infinity and continued would have to eventually lead to the destruction of every separation, or (dare I speak it, Raphael?) produce God. Such an attraction is love.⁵⁴

This thought experiment is noteworthy in many respects. First, attraction has no countermovement, is not integrated into an oppositional structure; the cosmogenesis of nature is conditioned not by attraction and repulsion (as for Herder), but by pure attraction and nothing else. The semantics of this text aligns more with Hemsterhuis' conception of attraction (which also has no opposite) and desire inasmuch as desire aims at unity with all that exists. Second, in contradistinction to Hemsterhuis, there is no resistance or inertia that inhibits unification, and in principle, no structural impossibility to desire achieving its ends. Instead, attraction sets into motion a multiplication without end that culminates in the elimination of distinctions. In this ontology of attraction, every being is in principle unifiable with every other being. Third, attraction culminates in what Schelling would later describe as the logic of mythology, namely in a theogonic process; the force of attraction does not posit a God standing outside space and time, nor a pantheistic God in which God is simply all of nature, but rather, God realizes itself through the historical unfolding of the force of attraction, is itself *produced* by human activity on the pathway toward disindividuation. This vision of the cosmos is much more extreme than a mere fusional fantasy, as it is radically desubjectified. It renders subjectivity itself—because it depends on differentiation—into a contingent form.

Processes of attraction multiply and potentiate themselves in such a way that relationality itself disappears. This vision reveals much more than just the contingency of forms of social and political differentiation (class, species, gender, maybe even the political itself)—but identifies the disappearance of such categories as commensurate with the realization of God. Whereas Dalberg draws on force to naturalize such distinctions, Schiller makes a political operation out of disindividuation by construing all distinctions and sources of differentiation into impediments to the telos of divine attraction. Schiller thereby relativizes the entire field of social and political organization,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 227.

making all social symbolic codes of separation appear incompatible with the sacred. Social differentiation becomes blasphemy. Schiller, after the encounter with Kant's writings, will disavow this telos of absolute attraction in favor of a more balanced notion of aesthetic education; nevertheless, the speculative prioritization of processes of disindividuation found in the *Philosophical Letters* is taken up by romantic poets and thinkers, in turn providing a significant impetus for a concept of force as the absolute unconditioning of given social realities.

Novalis' indebtedness to the genealogy of attraction in which Hemsterhuis and Schiller play key mediating roles has been well acknowledged in the scholarship on German Romanticism.⁵⁵ In his notes on Hemsterhuis' *Alexis*, Novalis emphasizes philosophical cosmotechnical operations—coordinating “the *forces* of the individual with the *forces* of the cosmos”⁵⁶—as a model for the poetic generation of “the most intimate, wonderful community.”⁵⁷ More even than Novalis, however, Karoline von Günderrode, who had read Herder and Hemsterhuis and studied Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, develops a politics of force that does not disavow, nor even sublimate, the violence in nature-philosophical processes of individuation and disindividuation.⁵⁸ In one of her nature-philosophical texts, *The Idea of the Earth*, she writes: “We call life the most intimate mixture of different elements with the highest degree of contact and attraction.”⁵⁹ Attraction (*Anziehungskraft*) and contact (*Berührung*): these concepts imbue the erotics of individuation with a violent potentiality. Force, even at its most erotically (or homoerotically) charged—as in her ballad “Piedro,” for example, in which male combatants become lovers who consummate their erotic union in death—implies struggles for power and a potential for violence. In her notes on Schelling, she grasps the operations of *Naturphilosophie* through the semantics of conflict. She writes: “If we think about two beings of unequal

⁵⁵ See, for example, Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁵⁶ Novalis [Friedrich von Hardenberg], *Novalis' Schriften*, vol. 2, eds. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl, and Gerhard Schulz et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983), 372.

⁵⁷ Ibid. For a recent illustration of how Romantic poetry brings the transformation of forces into visibility, see Cornelia Zumbusch, “‘Fire Machines’: *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and the Transformation of Forces,” *Forces of Nature. Dynamism and Agency in German Romanticism*, eds. Adrian Renner and Frederike Middelhoff (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022), 147-168.

⁵⁸ For the important link between Günderrode and Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*, see Adrian Renner, “Dynamic Perceptions: Forces of Nature and Powers of the Senses in Schelling, Novalis, and Günderrode,” *Forces of Nature. Dynamism and Agency in German Romanticism*, eds. Adrian Renner and Frederike Middelhoff (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022), 101-126.

⁵⁹ Karoline von Günderrode, *Samtliche Werke und ausgewählte Studien*, vol. 1, ed. Walther Morgenthaler (Basel: Stroemfeld, 2006), 446. References to Günderrode's works will be based on this edition, indicating volume and page number.

size, the larger one will attract and will, so to speak, consume the smaller one.”⁶⁰ The question is implicit: what resources do “smaller beings” have to resist the larger ones?

In an early dialogue entitled “The Manes”—manes were the spirits of the dead often revered as gods—one of the interlocutors suggests that the dead can enter into a relationship with the living “inasmuch as [one has] something homogeneous”⁶¹ with them. The human mind thereby becomes a potential archive for all individuated beings: “Death is a chemical process, a separation of forces, but not an annihilator; it does not break the bond between myself and similar souls.”⁶² Every thought homogeneous with that of another individuated being thus preserves and transmits, whether consciously or not, the forces (*Kräfte*) of this individual. The chemical interpretation of death—because it separates forces but does not destroy them—enables such forces to transcend seemingly insuperable barriers, such as time, space, gender, and class. Thus “smaller beings” can always transmit something of the energy or force of all beings that come before them, even the most monumental, and vice versa. In the “Manes” the operation that binds past, present and future in this manner is described as a prophetic gift, one that opens up a “sense for the future.”⁶³

These elements of an ethics and politics of force—one that melds the violence of actualization with the potential for novelty, in turn affirming processes of disindividuation (death) as part of a chain of cultural transmission—come to the foreground in an important but understudied poem that Günderröde wrote about the Roman statesman Brutus. Let us recall that Brutus was also important for Hemsterhuis, as he exemplified the use of the moral organ to set himself at odds with the seeming course of history, to go against the grain of the norms governing his contemporaneous moment. Günderröde’s poem “Brutus” takes place at a critical juncture in the history of political forms, a transitional moment, one in which the Republic of Rome is set on its march toward empire. Günderröde folds the tragedy of empire into lyrical form: Brutus slays Caesar for the sake of the republican ideal, but is then subsequently overwhelmed and defeated by the forces of empire. The poem thus intervenes in a seemingly teleological historical movement—from Republic to Empire—and seeks to uncover a resistance against the inexorability of political regression. This is the pretext to which one must be attuned while reading the poem. The event of the poem

⁶⁰ SW 2.388.

⁶¹ SW 1.32.

⁶² SW 1.33.

⁶³ SW 1.35.

thus describes a revolutionary context, albeit one that functions as an inversion of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century (which also, however, devolved into tyranny): the death of Brutus marks the turning of time when democracy becomes tyranny. When Brutus kills Caesar the individual, he actually and unwittingly gives birth to the stable symbolic and political form of Caesar, the *Kaiser*, emperor or king, who, as we know, has multiple bodies, one of which supposedly never dies.

Force as violence marks the entirety of Günderröde's "Brutus," which focuses specifically on two acts of violence and their relation: the death of Caesar and the death of Brutus. The process of disindividuation that takes place in this poem concerns self-extinction rather than erotic fusion. We thus return to Weil's description of the tendency of force to drift into violence: force as that which turns human beings into things. However, in this instance, Günderröde examines how two divergent concepts of force—force as violence and force as emergent potentiality—coalesce and become entangled with one another. What does she do with this troubling figure of thought? The poem reads as follows:

Brutus

Long ago Caesar was once butchered for freedom,
In the fullness of his fame, of his life.
And Brutus strides to the high goal
That he so ardently seeks to seize;

And yet, he is soon deranged by darkness,
His luck wavers in such a bold play,
And still he wrestles courageously toward his goal
Up until the death that he proudly disdained,

For more joyfully than previously in Caesar's side,
Brutus' dagger sinks into Brutus' breast
And only by dying does freedom become his prize.

Thus did a true priest, Brutus himself,
Sacrifice himself to freedom, to his god,
And yet: whoever dies for his god lives in his god.

[Der Freiheit ward einst Cäsar hingeschlachtet,
In seines Ruhmes seines Lebens Fülle.
Und Brutus schreitet zu dem hohen Ziele
Das zu erfassen er so sehnlich trachtet;

Doch bald wird es von Dunkel ihm umnachtet
 Es schwankt sein Glück in solchem kühnen Spiele,
 Doch ringt er muthig noch nach seinem Ziele
 Bis zu dem Tode, den er stolz verachtet,

Denn freudiger als einst in Cäsars Seite
 Senkt Brutus Dolch in Brutus Busen sich
 Und sterbend erst wird Freiheit seine Beute.

So opferte der Freiheit seinem Gotte
 Ein wahrer Priester, Brutus selber sich,
 Doch wer ihm stirbt, der lebt in seinem Gotte.]⁶⁴

Some points bear mentioning before examining the ethics and politics of force as it comes to light in this poem. First, the poem is a mirror—not just in the mirroring structure of its rhyme, but in its very conceptuality. The first substantive word to appear in the poem is freedom, the last is God. But we know that this last instance of God is nothing other *than* freedom (Brutus “sacrificed to freedom, to his god”). Thus the alpha and omega, the origin and telos of the poem is freedom.

Second, the poem is a sonnet; in its very form, it is an archive of what Günderrode calls in another poem “roman force”⁶⁵ (*römische Kraft*), stretching back through Petrarch to antiquity (and although Petrarchan, this sonnet in fact fuses Petrarchan form and Shakespearean content: the Brutus of *Julius Caesar*). The sonnet structure is organized around a series of turns, above all around the *volta* between the stanza and the sextet. The stanza already contains a turn revolving around the nature-philosophical dyad of light and gravity, from Brutus’ ascent towards the high goal, with its implication of solarility, to the descent, the envelopment or insanity of darkness, with its implication of the subterranean. Something about Brutus thus unites two opposed tendencies: an elevation towards the ideal together

⁶⁴ SW 1.374.

⁶⁵ SW 1.369. The poem in question is “Buonaparte in Egypten,” which seems to turn a blind eye to the imperialistic fervor with which Napoleon invaded Egypt. Napoleon appears in this poem as the progenitor of Novalis’ *Novices of Sais*, although bringing Novalis’ Romanticism into the contemporary political world, with Napoleon as the new novice who will finally reawaken the slumbering secrets of the past. The politics of the poem is somewhat complicated by the entanglement of East and West (as Egypt is the origin of light emerging from darkness; Napoleon bringing the light of freedom to Egypt thus could make Napoleon into a product of Egypt returning to itself), as well as the ambiguity surrounding “Roman force”—as violence, but also as the potentiality of a suppressed and unfinished past that resurfaces in the present.

with the corporeal struggle and a descent into madness, enveloped by death—rise and fall.

But what rises and falls with Brutus? Let us focus on this line:

And Brutus strides to the high goal,
That he so ardently seeks to seize.

Strangely, the semantics of this line seem to fit Caesar more than Brutus: the man who seeks to seize political control. One could easily replace “Brutus” with “Caesar,” and the line would make perfect sense. However, this formal interchangeability conceals contrary political operations. The high goal that Brutus ardently seeks to seize is in fact something that has already been lost: the republican political body. The “goal” or *telos* that rises and falls with Brutus, then, is this body, which becomes a virtual body, a potential body, no longer actual. Such is the first turn of the poem that takes place in the stanza, in the movement from solarity into the night of derangement, *Umnachtung*: the loss of the republican body.

But there is a second turn, the proper *volta* of the poem. In this turn, Brutus turns his dagger on himself; he disindividuates himself. This too, however, is not mere capitulation or death. At this moment, readers witness Brutus becoming a complete being, simultaneously subject and object in a striking syntactic mirroring: *Senkt Brutus Dolch in Brutus Busen sich*. With this reflexive structure, Brutus makes his own body into the *telos* of speculative thought: he becomes the subject-object of history. Thus, while he loses his body in disindividuation, he nevertheless becomes one with the virtual body held *in potentia*, one that can remain operative long after corporeal disintegration. The political ideal that the subject-object of the poem comes to embody represents a countermovement to the course of history, producing a caesura in the trajectory according to which Empire supplants Republic. In the destruction of the physical body—an act of destruction that produces and preserves the symbolic republican body—Brutus turns against time, embodying what Hölderlin would later call in his *Pindar Fragments* the wisdom of betrayal.⁶⁶ In the betrayal of time, the violation of the norm becomes a second-order ideal. Brutus must *steal* freedom—as freedom becomes Brutus’ prize or loot (*Beute*), something taken by force—from the historical process that would seek to occlude its possibility: only in an act of transgression, by standing against history (as Hemsterhuis also understood

⁶⁶ Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. Michael Knaupp, vol. 2 (Munich: Hanser, 1992), 379.

the case of Brutus)—by *becoming criminal*—can freedom come into full sensuous appearance.⁶⁷

In this celebration of the betrayal of time, the poem traverses a field of nature-philosophical forces coordinated with political regimes that manifest themselves in the structure of lyric organization. While the stanza, the first eight lines, describes how light descends into darkness, corresponding to the overcoming of the Republic by Empire, the last six lines, the *volta*, restores the integrity of the wounded collective body by virtualizing it, by turning it into an ever-present potentiality: by becoming a general symbolic form in which the dissolution of the body preserves not just the individual body (Brutus) but the body for which he stands (the Republic). Such is the import of the final line of the poem, one in which the annihilated human body is retained in the divine body, still living in its god. G nderrode thereby imagines a counter-history of political bodies in the West, one in which instead of a *Kaiser*, the republican body, the *Brutus*, becomes the dominant political form. What G nderrode called “Roman force” is thus historically and symbolically inverted: from Empire to Republic.

The poem also effects a conceptual transformation in the very operation of force: namely from force as pure violence, naked power, to a different sort of force, the force of potentiality. But this form of potentiality has a violence as well: a symbolic violence, or the capacity to elevate and denigrate accretions of significance granted to specific entities (in this case: Caesar and Brutus). G nderrode’s “Brutus” begins with brute force. The word “brutal” is already current in the eighteenth century, applied typically to animals, or to that being outside the order of the human, the *brute*. And the poem does begin with the death of one who dies like an animal: Caesar, the pinnacle of the human, butchered (*hingeschlachtet*). The form of death here occurs as waste: life as a mere thing, cast aside. Caesar ends in abjection: an expulsion incapable of effecting a transformation. He dies, as Hegel would later write in reference to revolutionary violence, “with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage.”⁶⁸ To this form of violence, G nderrode opposes the ideal of *sacrifice* (*er opferte sich*). Sacrifice in this instance, however, has a peculiar form: Brutus the priest sacrifices *himself* as victim, thereby becoming both sacrificing and sacrificed. To draw upon Giorgio Agamben’s thought: Brutus is not just the *homo sacer*, expelled from the social body, but

⁶⁷ My gratitude goes to members of the German Department from Johns Hopkins University who heard a version of this section of the paper and whose feedback I have incorporated into this piece.

⁶⁸ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 360.

the very medium of the sacred.⁶⁹ In becoming both the source of sacred power and sacrificial object, Brutus robs the power of the dominant symbolic form (*imperium*) from harvesting his sacrificial energy; he becomes the source of his own symbolic power. Caesar is thus evacuated of symbolic power inasmuch as he is merely butchered, rendered unproductive; whereas Brutus, by becoming sacrificer and sacrificed at once, is imbued with an absolute symbolic power. Günderrode thus switches the semantic and symbolic positions of Caesar and Brutus; Caesar becomes the Brute, slaughtered, while Brutus is elevated to a symbolic political and theological absolute.

There is more. This self-sacrifice is thus no mere self-sacrifice, but—as Hemsterhuis noted previously with respect to Brutus—a protest against the dominant symbolic order. Brutus channels revolutionary violence against the idea of *imperium*, albeit only by exercising violence on his own body. This act nevertheless robs *imperium* of the ability to determine what is sacred; Brutus makes not only his own singular human body, but also the vanishing political body (i.e. the Republic) into a sacred form, excluding the emergent *imperium* from the economy of sacrifice that constitutes sacred power. The final gnomic utterance of the poem personalizes the ideal of freedom in this self-sacrifice: *wer ihm stirbt, der lebt in seinem Gotte*, “whoever dies for him [i.e. for his god] lives in his god.” However, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely for whose sake one dies in this line. The most obvious reading declares that whoever dies for one’s god—for the sake of freedom—lives on in the virtualized ideal of this god, becoming a particular being inscribed in the very history of freedom. And yet, the line equally suggests an interchangeability between general and particular, between the idea of freedom and the singularity of Brutus, as if Brutus could almost take the place of him for whose sake one must die. In this displacement, we read a different possibility in the final line: whoever dies for Brutus, lives in Brutus’ God (freedom).

The implicit philosophy of lyric tragedy that comes to light in this poem can be productively compared with the revolutionary philosophy of history in Hölderlin’s *Empedocles* drama, one in which the future democratic body demands a collective mobilization be marshalled by a singular charismatic individual. Precisely because the charismatic individual threatens the viability of the coming community with a regression into tyranny, the revolutionary—Empedocles, in Hölderlin’s tragedy—must dissolve his body in the sacred fire of Aetna in order to become a more generalized symbolic form. Political rejuvenation thus depends upon disindividuation. In the case of Günderrode,

⁶⁹ See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

however, disindividuation is accompanied by the resilience of the effective power of the individual; in her work, there is no pure dissolution of the individual, no desire for oblivion that utterly eliminates all traces of individuality. On the contrary, the dissolution of the individual maintains its particularized symbolic energy through its capacity to generate bonds with others. Through the particularity of this bond, its effective force, which continues long after disindividuation (or death), continues to stimulate the production of new collective forms.

Let us recall what G nderrode writes about Schelling’s concept of force: “If we think about two beings of unequal size, the larger one will attract and will, so to speak, consume the smaller one.”⁷⁰ Precisely this attraction and consumption seems to take place with the death of Brutus: the Empire consumes the Republic. But G nderrode switches the charges; she makes Brutus the bearer of energetic, sacred, and transformative force, a force more attractive than the all-consuming pull of Empire. What would it be like to inhabit this sort of world? The poem indicates the contours of a world whose symbolic attractions would be utterly different than those characterizing the dominant political history of the West. It is possible to intimate how this world might look or might have looked: in this alternative reality, Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* would have been named *Marcus Junius Brutus*.

To conclude, G nderrode invokes implicit operations of force in the lyric act—by switching polarities (light / darkness, Brutus / Caesar)—to preserve a democratic republican ideal in a virtualized body and thereby to contravene the seeming momentum of history in its movement from Republic to Empire. The goal of this act is to uncondition the forces of empire, or what Hemsterhuis would have designated as the dominant cultural tendencies at an aphelion, at the precise moment when a planet lies at the furthest point away from the sun and a culture appears in its most entrenched state of stagnation and darkness. G nderrode’s ethics and politics of force are deeply indebted to the discursive form given shape by Hemsterhuis’ thought. The features of his thought had a decisive impact on the range of conceptual and imaginative operations undertaken in the name of force: first, an ecstatic form of desire, when actualized through the moral organ’s attempt to unite the soul with the entirety of cosmic order, approaches, but never realizes, a form of identification that later thinkers such as Herder would associate with unstable processes of disindividuation; and second, this precise attempt at cosmic identification, for all of its normative universality, is invested with a power of subjective estrangement

⁷⁰ SW 2.388.

such that individuals (such as Brutus) can stand against their dominant cultural tendencies. This paper has followed two different strands of development taken in the wake of these features. Herder and Goethe respond to Hemsterhuis' ecstatic force and its potentially radical disruption of contemporary normativity by redirecting force away from processes of disindividuation and towards stabilizing social and ethical forms; whereas Schiller, writing before Kant, and Günderrode use force to uncondition the present by turning against the naturalization of social and cultural distinctions (class, gender, nation) and opening up the possibility for a counter-historical symbolic order, the imagination of a world in which the forces of empire would no longer represent the dominant attractor guiding the historical trajectory of political forms.

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Theodicy across Scales

Hemsterhuis's *Alexis* and the Dawn of Romantic Cosmism

*Kirill Chepurin**

ABSTRACT

This essay re-reads François Hemsterhuis's *Alexis* as a post-Copernican cosmic theodicy that prefigures a central nexus of concerns in Early German Romanticism. This theodicy is cross-scalar, in that it functions across three disparate scales: the history of global humanity, the geo-cosmic history of the Earth, and the broader processuality of the universe. From the perspective of this cross-scalar entanglement, I reconstruct Hemsterhuis's vision of the ages of the world and his theodical narrative of the golden age, the Fall, and the cosmic destiny of humanity. Additionally, I offer a counter-reading of this destiny through the story of the Moon in *Alexis*, and through the contingency, uselessness, and cosmic failure that the Moon embodies.

Keywords: cosmism, theodicy, philosophy of history, the golden age, contingency, cosmic failure

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Aufsatz wird François Hemsterhuis' *Alexis* als eine postkopernikanische kosmische Theodizee gedeutet, die eine Reihe der zentralen frühromantischen Problemstellungen vorwegnimmt. Diese Theodizee ist skalenübergreifend in dem Sinne, dass sie auf drei Ebenen zugleich funktioniert: der globalen Geschichte der Menschheit, der geokosmischen Geschichte der Erde und der allumfassenden Prozessualität des Universums. Aus der Perspektive dieser skalenübergreifenden Verflechtung rekonstruiert der Aufsatz die Hemsterhuis'sche Vision der Weltalter und seine Erzählung vom goldenen Zeitalter, dem Sündenfall und dem kosmischen Schicksal des Menschen. Zudem entwickelt der Aufsatz eine Gegenlesart dieses Schicksals durch die Figur des Mondes in *Alexis* und durch die Zufälligkeit, die Nutzlosigkeit und das kosmische Scheitern, die durch den Mond verkörpert werden.

Stichwörter: Kosmismus, Theodizee, Geschichtsphilosophie, das goldene Zeitalter, Kontingenz, kosmisches Scheitern

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“Die Welt bedarf keiner Erlösung [The world requires no redemption].”
—Hans-Joachim Mähl on the Hemsterhuisian universe¹

This essay offers an exegetical and speculative re-reading of François Hemsterhuis’s dialogue *Alexis* as a post-Copernican cosmic theodicy that anticipates a central nexus of concerns in the early German Romantic thinking of the human, the Earth, and the universe.² My approach here is less to trace the specific influence of this dialogue on individual Romantic figures than to discern a certain conceptual thread in Hemsterhuis that opens onto the Romantic ideas about inhabiting immanently the infinity, alienness, and contingency of the post-Copernican (Keplerian-Newtonian) universe.

Just like the Romantic project of universal *poiesis*, Hemsterhuisian thought, I want to suggest, is *cross-scalar*, in that it seeks to think across, and to bring conceptually together, three disparate temporal scales: the history of humanity across the globe; the geo-cosmic history of the planet Earth; and the broader processuality of the universe. I will be calling these scales, respectively, “the global,” “the planetary,” and “the cosmic.” From this perspective, the eighteenth century was arguably the last great age of cross-scalar thinking, and Romanticism its last great exemplification.³ Only today, with the emergence of “the planet” as a separate category and scale in the Anthropocene discourse, and with the rise of discourses of cosmic exploration and existential risk is this kind of cross-scalar thinking really making a return. These discourses, furthermore, raise again some of the burning questions of Romantic theodicy: can the history of global humanity, with its negativity and evils, be justified as somehow “good” or “useful” from a planetary or cosmic standpoint? Does humanity have a cosmic destiny—and no less importantly, what does one mean in this regard by “humanity,” and who is the subject of this destiny? What is the position and significance of the human mind and history on a de-centered planet amidst the infinite and contingent universe?

¹ Hans-Joachim Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1994), 281. The research in this article was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy in the context of the Cluster of Excellence *Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective* – EXC 2020 – Project ID 390608380.

² In what follows, I speak simply of “Romanticism” to designate the German *Frühromantik*.

³ I offer a reading of Romanticism as cross-scalar in Kirill Chepurin, “Novalis and the Schlegels,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Poststructuralism*, ed. Tilottama Rajan and Daniel Whistler (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

These questions stand at the center of Hemsterhuis's cosmist thinking. As I will show, the theodical narrative of the golden age, the Fall, and the cosmic future of humanity that he constructs in *Alexis*, as well as the logic of periodization advanced in this narrative and the conception of poetry that underlies it, all function programmatically across the above three scales. The interplay of these scales itself serves a theodical purpose: to construct a narrative of human history of a kind that would reconfigure post-Copernican cosmic contingency as conducive to the development of humanity and justify the evils of the modern human condition as demonstrating the infinity of human nature and its cosmic destiny. Hemsterhuis offers a singular cosmist model for theodicy—a model that is highly modern, despite the classical setting he chooses for *Alexis*, and highly synthetic, combining astronomy, poetry, philosophy, and history in a way that would appeal to the ambition of Romanticism—in its projects of universal system and universal history—to re-mediate poetically the entire universe.

All of this is not to claim that Hemsterhuis single-handedly determines the logics of Romantic theodicy or Romantic cosmism. Rather, Hemsterhuis's *Alexis* should be seen, alongside texts such as Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Humanity*, as a key carrier of the more-than-human energies of the pre-Revolutionary decades and a conceptual laboratory in which, under the storm and stress of these energies, certain pre-Revolutionary tendencies of Enlightenment thought are distilled, amplified, and transmuted before they are picked up by the Romantics as, in a sense, already their own or of their own time—leading the young Novalis, inspired by Hemsterhuis, to proclaim theodically: “There is absolutely nothing evil in the world.”⁴

1. Writing at the Dawn of the Romantic Age

Alexis, or on the Golden Age, written mostly in the early 1780s but published in 1787 in F.H. Jacobi's German translation and half a year later in the original French, is one of François Hemsterhuis's most striking texts.⁵ Formally, it is

⁴ Quoted in a letter by Friedrich Schlegel; see *The Birth of Novalis: Friedrich von Hardenberg's Journal of 1797, with Selected Letters and Documents*, trans. and ed. Bruce Donehower (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 37.

⁵ On the citation of Hemsterhuis's published work using the Edinburgh Edition, see the editor's introduction to this special issue. I further cite the following editions of Hemsterhuis's work: the dual-language German-French edition of *Alexis* found in Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Werke*, Bd. 5,1: *Kleine Schriften II, 1787-1817*, ed. Catia Goretzki and Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2007), 7-102—henceforth cited in-text as *JW* (I consider it important to reference Jacobi's German translation due to its influence on the Romantics); the 1782 *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, which is to be found (alongside the

a classicist work: a Socratic dialogue set in classical Athens, and appearing to be almost atemporal—outside all turmoil of modernity and history—in its setting and subject-matter.

The dialogue's structure is simple. It has two interlocutors (Diocles, who may be taken to stand in for Hemsterhuis himself, and his younger friend Alexis) and may be divided into three parts, which are united by the overarching themes of the golden age and the *agon* between philosophy and poetry. The first part serves to lead up to the centerpiece of the dialogue: the cosmic myth of the golden age, which is then philosophically unpacked by Diocles in the third part. Alexis may be said to represent an aspiring enlightened philosopher who is skeptical of poetry, and of the tall tales that poets invent. Over the course of the dialogue, and most emphatically towards its end, Diocles tries to convince Alexis of the primacy of poetry and the truth of the idea of the golden age—and ultimately succeeds. Thematically, all of this at first glance seems traditional, including the insertion of a poetic myth which is then declared to be fictional yet to contain a true philosophical core.

The myth itself—a post-Copernican reconfiguration of the story of the Fall as expulsion from earthly paradise—is where one may first observe the threatening contingency and darkness beneath the dialogue's lucid setting. The astronomical presupposition for Hemsterhuis's myth is the fact that the Earth's rotational axis is tilted, and not perpendicular to its orbital plane; this axial tilt, or obliquity, is what causes the change of seasons. Based on the principles of Newtonian mechanics, the Earth's tilt, as Hemsterhuis argues in his scholarly notes to *Alexis* and in a separate text from 1784,⁶ could not have appeared on its own, and must have been produced through the interference of a foreign force. This cosmic contingency, Hemsterhuis suggests, consisted in the appearance of the Moon. Our planet's satellite was not formed together with it but arrived as a comet from outer space. This comet was captured by the Earth's gravity, causing the planet's axis to tilt and putting a devastating end to what had previously been, across the entire globe, the golden age of paradisaal harmony and eternal spring.⁷ This end was,

French original) in François Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres philosophiques*, ed. Jacob van Sluis (Leiden: Brill, 2011)—henceforth cited in-text as *OP*; and François Hemsterhuis, *Œuvres inédites*, ed. Jacob van Sluis (self-published, 2021)—henceforth cited in-text as *IN*. On the publication history of *Alexis*, see *JW* 468-473.

⁶ See Hemsterhuis's *Letter on the Rotation of the Planets* in *IN* 129-36. On the pre-Hemsterhuisian tradition of interpreting the Fall as a cosmic catastrophe, see Michele Cometa, "Poetry and Catastrophe: The Romantic Tradition of Hemsterhuis's *Alexis ou de l'âge d'or*," in *Hemsterhuis: A European Philosopher Rediscovered*, ed. Claudia Melica (Napoli: Vivarium, 2005), 103-122.

⁷ Hemsterhuis's position is a version of the so-called capture theory of the Moon's origin. The only alternative considered by him—the co-formation theory—is what he rejects based

however, the beginning of history as we know it. To this day, for Hemsterhuis, humanity and the planet have not recovered from this event, so that catastrophe is inscribed into the very constitution of human and planetary history.

More generally, as one reads Hemsterhuis's dialogue, one can observe an escalating tension at the heart of it—between, to put this schematically, its outward classicism and the more radical proto-Romantic impulse that seeks to break through to the surface, and in the end does break through, consuming the classical formalism in the pure light of Diocles's "enthusiastic" prophetic proclamation ("enthusiasm" is a key term in the dialogue) of the coming epoch of absolute bliss. This proclamation further strips the text of its atemporality even as this atemporality continues to be formally enacted, and places Hemsterhuis's thinking very much at the dawn of the Romantic explosion of the 1790s. Importantly, the idea of a new golden age that would unite humanity with itself, with the Earth, and with the Sun emerges in *Alexis* out of a reality that is grasped as negative and divided, starting with the first catastrophe, the Fall from paradisaical felicity due to the interference of an external cosmic force. The resulting turmoil of history, or the turmoil that *is* history, grows to be the dialogue's central problematic, reflecting in this the late-Enlightenment concern with the darkness, catastrophism, and overall negativity of history, and with the possibility of retaining hope amidst this negativity. Moreover, the golden age itself becomes, over the course of the dialogue, increasingly dynamic and processual; it loses its classical placement in the past and ends up being ever *in development* or in striving. As we will see, the concept "golden age" doubles and triples, perhaps even quadruples, towards the end of the text, and is identified dialectically with the striving for infinity that drives the entire history of humanity: a paradigmatically modern understanding of history and human nature.

Importantly, this striving does not fit the stereotype of an orderly progress. It is permeated, instead, by an insatiable thirst for possession, and by a cosmic anxiety and alienation generating the longing (*désir*, translated by Jacobi as *Sehnsucht*) for a return to an "absolute" state without division or striving. Hemsterhuis's myth of the golden age (and thus his cross-scalar construction of universal history) inhabits not an orderly cosmos, but what appears, from the earthly perspective, as an alien universe of contingency and disorder. It is as if the dialogue's classicist form were meant to contain the

on Newtonian principles. The currently most widespread hypothesis, the impact theory, is not considered by him.

intensifying negativity and chaos of the critical late-eighteenth-century moment at which it is written—the negativity and chaos that would erupt, most forcefully, in Romanticism.

That is not to say that the dialogue’s form and setting should be discarded as merely an external shell in favor of the proto-Romantic sense of chaos, and the no less proto-Romantic impulse of bliss, that lurk underneath the text’s classicism and implode it from within. On the contrary: the form matters, because it serves the goal of distancing from and *keeping within bounds* the chaos, disorder, and catastrophe that constitute, as it were, the dark ground of the late-eighteenth-century thought, intensifying following the 1755 Lisbon earthquake and the growing sense of the immensity and contingency of the universe. In this regard, the form itself serves the purpose of what Hans Blumenberg calls “the self-assertion of reason” vis-à-vis the chaotic contingency of modern reality, which reason seeks to subdue and order.⁸ While the dialogue is rooted in its historical moment, the form serves to resist any reduction *to* this specific moment. Instead, the dialogue’s classicism displaces the present towards a meta-standpoint from which to construct a universal history and a system of times or “ages of the world” (*âges / Weltalter*).⁹ This kind of meta-standpoint is important to Romanticism, too. From it, the philosopher can inquire into the origins and order of history across its different epochs and scales; justify the negativity of history by finding coherence in it, and by discovering usefulness even in catastrophe; and, finally, provide a horizon of salvation from history’s violence, divisions, and alienations. In other words, the meta-standpoint of universal history makes it possible to re-mediate rationally the contingency of reality, and to erect on top of the frightening abyss of contingency a philosophy of history that would serve, at the same time, as a theodicy. This theodicy recasts optimistically the ongoing catastrophe of history, pointing Romantically towards a new blessed age for all, a pantheism realized, and the prospect of a future that would be perfectly fulfilled and no longer threatening.

2. Demiurgic Contingency and the Specter of Gnosticism

The Moon arrives, in Hemsterhuis’s myth, as an alien demiurgic power—a bungling demiurge that, through mere chance, creates the world of human

⁸ See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983).

⁹ In this essay, I only reconstruct Hemsterhuis’s ages of the world in *Alexis*. For his system of times in *Letter on Man*, see Daniel Whistler, *Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

and planetary history as we know it by exacting on the Earth a force that “disorders” (*désordre / Unordnung*) all earthly materials and re-“mixes” them into a new state of conflict (*combat / Streit*), confusion (*confusion / Verwirrung*), and mixture (*mixture / Vermischung* [JW 54-5 / EE 2.136]). In the original catastrophe as imagined by Hemsterhuis, the contingency of the universe—contingency which, one could say following Blumenberg, reoccupies in modernity the infinity and infinite hidden will of God—reveals a quasi-divine power that brings with it disorder and upheaval. And although Newtonianism assumes a single uniform force of gravity acting throughout the universe, Hemsterhuis in his notes to *Alexis* speaks of the Moon as “a foreign force” or “alien force” (*une force étrangère / eine fremde Kraft* [JW 99 / EE 2.151]) that disrupts the harmonious unity of the Earth with the Sun, ending the solar golden age of pantheism on the Earth. The “alienness” indexes here the fact that, without the intervention of the Moon, the Earth-Sun system would have remained stable; the contingency that originates from the cosmic outside to this system, then, appears as a force that is foreign or other. From the de-centered standpoint of the infinite universe, there is but one universal force; from the earthly and human perspective, however, the sudden arrival of the Moon discloses a malignant and alien influence. This creates a quasi-Gnostic dualism between the Sun and the Moon, and accordingly between the solar power of pantheism and salvation, on the one hand, and the lunar power of alienation, division, and fallenness, on the other. Following this, the motifs of estrangement and doubling run, as we will see, throughout the dialogue.

The doubling intervenes into the original golden age, creating a reality of division or twoness; from the perspective of this doubling, the golden age appears as an epoch of absolute oneness. During this epoch, the Earth’s axis is not yet tilted and the Earth-Sun system is blissfully sufficient unto itself. The golden age is, most centrally, a state of “equality” or “equalness” (*égalité / Gleichheit* [JW 51 / EE 2.135]) in which the Earth and everything on it—from material substances and atmospheric processes to plants, animals, and humans—simply *are what they are*, without any striving or lack, existing in a state of utter harmony and self-identity, or what Schelling would call the perfect A=A (*all is what it is*). This state is one of “nature’s constant equality.” While there are different species and different climate zones, each is completely “uniform” (*uniforme / gleichförmig*). The sea and the wind are perfectly tranquil (JW 51 / EE 2.135). There is no change of seasons—instead, in the absence of an axial tilt, each latitudinal belt has a stable climate that produces everything that all species that inhabit it might ever need. Accordingly, there is no global movement of migration, as well as no “commerce,” no desire for competition (no “ambition”), and no “spirit of

property or of conquest,” or, as Jacobi translates it more emphatically, no pathological craving for them—no *Eigenthumssucht* or *Eroberungssucht*. This picture is antithetical to the age of global commerce, colonialism, and modern political economy that is the Enlightenment.

In the golden age, even the differences between species are not *real* differences, insofar as they lead to no contradiction, and the being of no species is premised on the negation of another species. In other words, one species’ *simply being what it is* does not negate the *being what it is* of any other species, and engenders no conflict and no dialectical process: a highly un-Hegelian image. Humanity’s paradisaic felicity (*bonheur* / *Glückseligkeit*) also consists in an immediate oneness with itself in its species-being: like all other being, human being simply is what it is, and every human senses herself to be one with other humans, immediately seeking to share her happiness with others, whose happiness in turn reinforces her own (*JW* 52 / *EE* 2.135). This is not a finite structure of happiness premised on satisfying a need or filling a lack—but a bliss of the immediate dissolution of the particular in the universal, or in the All. That humankind in this state does not yet know finitude is further emphasized by the fact that the human during the golden age is not aware of death: not because one does not die, but because one does not fear death—and death is indistinguishable from sleep or even, as Hemsterhuis seems to suggest with implicit reference to the idea of metempsychosis, from awakening within one continuous species-being (*JW* 54 / *EE* 2.136).¹⁰

The Earth is an endless *plenum* of natural riches (of nature’s *productions infimies* / *unendliche Zeugungskraft*) in which there is no scarcity. The Earth, and each form of being on it, is a self-sufficient All unto itself. Even trees are “always equally laden with fruit, flowers and greenery” at the same time (*JW* 51 / *EE* 2.135): an image of an absolute atemporal abundance without lack. The conjunction of human felicity across the globe and the planetary felicity (endless plenitude) of the Earth signifies, furthermore, the bliss of an immediate oneness between the global, the planetary, and the cosmic (i.e., the Sun as the condition for natural abundance on the Earth). This entire cross-scalar system is absolutely harmonious, and this state of harmony across scales *is* the golden age for the planet Earth and everything on it. The condition of possibility of the golden age is a cosmic condition.

During this golden age, everything is, and indefinitely remains, in its natural place—and each natural place is “divine,” ontologically because it is

¹⁰ On the significance of death in its connection with metempsychosis in Hemsterhuis, see Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, 268.

an All unto itself, and cosmologically because it is determined by the unchanging benevolent solar influence on the surface of the Earth. Such is the cosmological sense in which this age is for Hemsterhuis an epoch of pantheism: since everything is divine in the above sense, God is perceived as omnipresent. During this period, humans are “much more distinctly affected by the omnipresence of the Divinity (*Divinité / Gottheit*)” (*JW* 53 / *EE* 2.136)—something, Jacobi appends in his translation, that is no longer possible “in our present state (*Zustande*)” (*JW* 53), i.e., the state of alienation and division, not immediacy.¹¹ The human soul in the golden age “swim[s] in a sea of sensual revelry” (*volupté / Wollust* [*JW* 53 / *EE* 2.136]). It should be noted that, from the perspective of Hemsterhuis’s broader organology,¹² human nature is not static but possesses a potentially infinite capacity for developing various “organs” of sensation, morality, and reason, but also for losing some of these organs in synchrony with humanity’s changing material conditions. Accordingly, in the golden age, the human possesses a (solar or pantheistic) sense-organ or “vehicle of sensation” (*JW* 74 / *EE* 2.142-3) which corresponds to the non-alienated planetary condition, and which becomes lost as the planetary condition changes—so that the human will regain this organ at the same time that the Earth as the human habitat regains its balance with the Sun.

This oneness is disrupted from the cosmic beyond—from the “faraway regions” relative to the Earth-Sun system, where the comet that would become the Moon originates (*JW* 54 / *EE* 2.136). In this way, the cosmic scale with its eccentricity and contingency intervenes into the planetary and global felicity. Flying close to the Sun, the comet which is to become the Moon is set ablaze, gaining a “flaming” visage due to which, as it subsequently approaches the Earth and gets captured by the planet’s gravity, it appears to the Earth’s inhabitants as a second, “increasingly immobile” ball of fire in the sky (*JW* 54 / *EE* 2.136). The gravitational effect of this near-collision is catastrophic: Hemsterhuis calls this a “terrible catastrophe” and “the great catastrophe of the terrestrial globe” (*JW* 56 / *EE* 2.136, *JW* 83 / *EE* 2.145). The disturbance of the Earth’s axis—the planet’s *falling-away* from its perfect state of balance—causes likewise a “strange alteration” in its surface and the “inner fluids” of its inhabitants (*JW* 54 / *EE* 2.136). In this

¹¹ In the original French, “dans notre état présent” refers not to the feeling of pantheism but to the “tone of effort or victory which appears to us illustrious and brilliant in our present condition” (*JW* 53 / *EE* 2.136). Jacobi, however, moves this phrase so as to explicitly describe the modern human condition as no longer possessing the affect of divine omnipresence.

¹² On Hemsterhuis’s organology, see Whistler, *Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy*.

planetary, animal, and human Fall (*chute / Fall* [JW 81 / EE 2.145]), everything suddenly becomes malicious and disordered. Seas and winds rise, stars change their position in the sky, and first clouds form which “stain” the clarity of the heavens. Rains and floods begin. Lightnings and thunder arrive. What used to be one becomes divided on a planetary scale—as symbolized materially by the violent fragmentation of the Earth’s crust (“soon,” Hemsterhuis narrates, “the thick crust of the Earth broke in a hundred places to give rise to disorder which tormented [*tourmentoit / ängstigte*] every part of it from within” [JW 55 / EE 2.136]).¹³ This material torment or *Angst* of the Earth, its own anxiety and fear, is inseparable from the first *Angst* of its inhabitants, who for the first time become alienated from the earth, the sea, and the skies. “They saw,” Hemsterhuis writes, “only a sea in turmoil, a strange and impure sky (*un ciel étranger & impur / einen fremden und unreinen Himmel*), and the doubtful and livid light of this hideous [celestial] body, the terrible principle of their sufferings” (JW 56 / EE 2.137).

Division and violence, confusion and conflict, are here as much a part of the “real” geophysical reality of the planet as the “ideal” mental reality across the animal and human realm. The Fall renders, furthermore, the “divine” dimension of reality divided or split for the first time—a pantheistic immanence transcendently torn apart—adding to the Gnostic overtones in Hemsterhuis’s depiction of an alien divinity under the alien sky, a divinity creating the shadow world of suffering:

Man who, shortly beforehand, adored in each star, in each flower, in each brother, at each dawn, a propitious God of which the Sun appeared as the most perfect symbol (*symbole / Bild*), believed to see in this new star the symbol of a victor God, more powerful than his own; an evil (*malfaisant / übelgesinnte*) God of destruction and of shadows (*ténèbres / Finsterniß*)—and this was the first cause of the foolish idea of a good and an evil principle. (JW 56 / EE 2.137)

We may observe in the above passage Hemsterhuis’s transcendental approach to history in which geophysical or natural developments are inseparable from the development of consciousness. In the Fall, human consciousness changes—becoming split and estranged—so that the world appears to, and begins to be articulated by, the human as a distribution of

¹³ The Earth’s materiality itself changes in this state of disorder: “The simple and uniform movement of the globe, which until then had prevented the different materials that it bore within from mixing together, from struggling with each other and fermenting with each other, was now destroyed and altered; nitre, sulphur, fire, all were confounded.... All the elements were in confusion, and their indigestible mixture gave birth to mixed, bastardised and, by nature, ambiguous materials” (JW 55 / EE 2.136).

binary categories: good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, mind and body, life and death. In particular, the Fall *enacts* death for the first time—as the first violent death on a mass scale (“millions of men and animals perished” [JW 56 / EE 2.136])—and this, too, tears consciousness apart. “For the first time, man saw death under a new aspect, as a forced state (*un état forcé / ein gewalthätiger Zustand*)”; in this way, the “horror” of death emerges, coming to define the new self-alienated condition of human finitude (JW 57 / EE 2.137). This horror is not exclusively human, either, emerging out of the disordered Earth not unlike the “black vapours” that appear with the Fall and externalize the inner planetary confusion (JW 55 / EE 2.136).

More generally, this entire “forced state” is planetary and cosmic too, just like the (no less forced) falling-away of the Earth’s axis under the influence of an alien force—echoing Hemsterhuis’s earlier description, in his 1770 *Letter on Desires*, of the “forced state” (*un état forcé*) of the entire universe. In this state, universal gravity or attraction (as tendency towards oneness) is contradicted by the isolated existence of bodies apart from each other (EE 1.85).¹⁴ “The All is in a forced state,” Hemsterhuis proclaims, “since, tending eternally to union, while remaining always composed of isolated individuals, the nature of the All exists eternally in a manifest contradiction with itself.” In Hemsterhuis’s moral astronomy, which famously influenced the Romantics, and which implies the view of the All as the one real ethical substance, gravity morphs with *eros*—attraction, desire, or love—while, again, an alien “Agent” or “a foreign force” is what tears this *Ur*-oneness apart, creating a universe of particular relational bodies governed by laws. “It is,” writes Hemsterhuis strikingly, “a foreign force (*une force étrangère / eine fremde Kraft*) which has broken down the total unity into individuals: and this force is God.” (EE 1.85; OP 172-3)

This makes the creation of the universe into the deed of an alien demiurge, and into the even *more* original catastrophe on a cosmic scale: the *Ur*-breaking of oneness, the *Ur*-falling apart. As a “foreign” or “alien” force, the “God” of which Hemsterhuis speaks is not to be understood as the transcendent creator-subject in the vein of the Christian God. After all, the force that draws the Moon to the Earth is likewise called by Hemsterhuis a foreign or alien force; similarly, “God” in *Letter on Desires* may be taken to index demiurgic cosmic contingency, or a cosmic event that breaks up the pre-original unity. One may recall here, for instance, Buffon’s popular idea, later taken up by Schelling, that the solar system originally used to be one

¹⁴ Gabriel Trop describes this state of the Newtonian universe in Hemsterhuis as “a non-coincidence between attractive force and inertia.” See Trop, “Hemsterhuis as Provocation: The German Reception of His Early Writings,” in EE 1. 46.

solar body, and that this primordial unity was shattered by an external force or external celestial body, something like a huge comet which created an impact that divided the one *Ur*-solar substance into separate masses that eventually turned into planets. An event of this kind seems perfectly in line with what Hemsterhuis, in both *Letter on Desire* and *Alexis*, understands by an alien cosmic force.

Returning to *Alexis* and placing its myth of the Fall within Hemsterhuis's vision of a universe that seeks unity yet remains dispersed, one might ask: in such a universe, what is the principle of death but a self-reflective awareness of oneself *as* an individual, and thus as a separate mortal body and not as one with the universal processuality of love?¹⁵ This awareness is precisely what the force of the lunar catastrophe introduces into human consciousness, ruining what appears, in view of the generally "forced state" of the universe depicted in *Letter on Desires*, as a rather unprecedented state of *unforced* bliss between the Sun and the Earth—itsself a contingent state, and thus prey to contingency.¹⁶ If attraction is desire, then the Moon intervenes into this bliss, creating an unhappy love triangle. In fact, from the perspective of Hemsterhuis's recasting of gravity as desire or love, the entire emergence of the Moon may be read as a tragic (and gendered) story of desire.¹⁷ All comets describe eccentric curves around the Sun, seeking to be one with this cosmic source of perfection¹⁸—yet the comet that would become the Moon could not, perhaps, temper its desire, and flew too close to the Sun. This only further set her desire ablaze ("the Sun" in French is masculine whereas "comet" and "the Moon" are feminine), and sent her onto a trajectory of near-collision with the Earth (also feminine). As a result, the Earth had to feel the entire, sudden and unwanted, impact of the Moon's desire, which was not desire *for* the Earth yet which disrupted the blissful Earth-Sun

¹⁵ Hence, in the original golden age, there was no death since an individual did not perceive itself, and was not perceived, as an individual body, but rather as immediately one with the universal "body" of its species. After the Fall, too, love or desire (as reproductive desire) is what connects an individual to the species, seeking to reconstitute the lost unity.

¹⁶ I would like to emphasize this point: not only the emergence of the Moon is contingent, but the golden age as the state of perfect harmony between the Earth and the Sun is cosmically contingent. It so happened that the golden age was possible for a while without the interference of any alien force—but in a universe in which an alien force starts operating from the very beginning, such an undisturbed golden age was by no means a necessary occurrence.

¹⁷ I follow here the suggestion of Claudia Melica, but interpret the story differently. See Melica, "Astronomy and Mythology: Hemsterhuis on the Moon," in *Hemsterhuis: A European Philosopher Rediscovered*, 100.

¹⁸ Cf. in the 1772 *Letter on Man and His Relations*: "The science of man, or the human mind, appears to move around perfection, like comets around the Sun, by describing very eccentric curves" (*EE* 1.123; *OP* 292-3).

relationship. This event had, furthermore, catastrophic consequences not only for the planet, but for the Moon itself. Aflame with desire yet unsatisfied, the Moon burnt out and died. A failed lover and an unwitting demiurge “of destruction and of shadows,” she turned into a barren wasteland, “a dead head, an inert essence of a useless eternity (*essence inerte & d’une éternité inutile*)” (*JW* 57 / *EE* 2.137).

Her “useless eternity”—and her “inertness” that (to recall *Letter on Desires* again) may be taken to exemplify the inertia which stands, across the universe, in contradiction with the force of love—places the Moon, this symbol of the dark and alien cosmic expanse, outside the temporality of history. This eternity is “useless” since it is eternally exhausted and burnt out, of no use to history, and containing no possibility anymore: an empty indefinite duration. It cannot, as such, be inscribed into the logic of historical periodization and development that is engendered on the Earth by the Fall. For all eternity, the Moon is doomed to embody a useless repetition or sameness, a fate that is itself a shadow double of the (endlessly fecund) sameness of the golden age. Her fire of love extinguished, the Moon becomes infertile and non(re)productive, a heavenly body without history and without future. She thus becomes the ultimate “queer” figure in Lee Edelman’s terms, i.e., as he describes it, one “which does not conduce to the logic of periodization or identity,” and does not “submit to a temporal logic”—or, as he continues in his analysis of the queer refusal of the reproductive temporality of history, “better, the distortion of that logic by the interference, *like a gravitational pull, of some other, unrecognized force.*”¹⁹ Hemsterhuis would call this gravitational force alien, and the useless eternity, and strange uselessness, of the Moon continues to embody the persistence of this alienness and queerness over and against the historical process (and the logic of historical periodization) that the encounter with the Moon triggers on the Earth.

To *correct* the lunar distortion, to chart a postlapsarian course towards infinite perfectibility and the restoration of a golden age, is the goal of the entire theodical narrative which follows the account of the Fall in *Alexis*, and to which I will turn below. Against the disturbance of the Fall, Hemsterhuis seeks to construct a narrative that would reconcile this disturbance via the logic of perfectibility and the proclaimed future perfection (the new golden age). Yet, the Moon in her useless eternity remains in *Alexis* an embodiment of a cosmic principle—the principle of cosmic contingency—that eternally

¹⁹ Lee Edelman et al., “Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion,” *GLQ* 13.2-3 (2007), 188; emphasis added.

refuses such theodical reconciliation, and remains non(re)productively and uselessly outside it. It is no wonder that Novalis would see in the postulation of the eternal nonproductivity of the Moon a defect in Hemsterhuis's narrative, and would assign humanity with the task of "educating" the Moon.²⁰ In that, Novalis exhibits an anxiety over what resists the meta-standpoint of universal history; he looks to inscribe the Moon back into the movement of possibility and usefulness. However, to do so is to fall into the logic of modern self-assertion as the desire or, in the Romantic language, striving (*Streben*) of the modern subject to expand onto and educate or shape the entirety of reality. It is also to miss the conceptual point of the *empty persistence* at the heart of post-Copernican cosmic contingency so evocatively grasped by Hemsterhuis in the figure of the Moon. In this contingency, no telos is guaranteed to be reached, and any cosmic desire, including the striving of the modern subject to educate everything and make everything useful, may ultimately fail. The Moon in *Alexis*, in her eternally failed desire, is a powerful symbol precisely because she persists in the possibility of such failure—over and against Hemsterhuis's theodical attempt to inscribe cosmic contingency into his narrative of perfectibility and his prophecy of the cosmic destiny of humanity and the golden age to come.

3. Philosophy, Poetry, and the Anxieties of History

In the original golden age, no history was possible or necessary. However, the Fall as the falling-away from the verticality of the golden age ruined this bliss, and since then humanity and the planet have been jointly striving to recover from that original catastrophe. As Hemsterhuis puts it in *Letter on the Rotation of the Planets*, the "irregularities" or "anomalies" that astronomers observe in the Moon's and the Earth's movement "are merely remnants of greater disorders, from which the Earth is trying to recover"—the cause of these disorders having been the arrival of the Moon and the resulting tilt of the Earth. "We see," Hemsterhuis continues, "that [the Earth] has been attempting to reorient its inclined axis" (*IN* 132).²¹ The process of this recovery is as geo-cosmic as it is human, and it is this cross-scalar process that constitutes history as Hemsterhuis constructs it.

This view of history, with the ideal of the golden age as its constant reference point and telos, generates a further kind of anxiety—over the character of the historical process itself, including most centrally the

²⁰ Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (München: Carl Hanser, 1978), 2:448.

²¹ Translated Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler.

historical development of humanity. Is the state of humanity simply worse now compared to the perfection of the golden age? And is history a purely negative thing—is historical temporality but a “temporal misfortune”²²? Generally, can this world out of joint, and the entirety of world history since the cessation of the golden age, be justified as *good* and *useful*, and not just a useless duration or degradation? This central theodical concern emerges already at the beginning of *Alexis*, where Diocles asserts categorically, in response to Alexis’s depiction of present human vices and the way they divide humans, that “human nature has *not* been bastardised (*abâtardie* / *ausgeartet*)” since the golden age (*JW* 19 / *EE* 2.125; emphasis added). The present state of human nature may lack the immediate fullness humanity enjoyed then; however, human nature remains essentially the same—and the Fall even appears, retrospectively, as a fortunate Fall insofar as it provided the impetus for the human to *rationaly develop* its capacities. Ultimately, even the present negative state of humanity is, in Hemsterhuis’s account, necessary and useful for the coming about of a better, even absolute future. From the standpoint of this future, coinciding with the standpoint of the universe as a totality, present imperfection appears as but a temporary state of “irregular” or “anomalous” oscillation or imbalance, and as part of the eccentric movement to higher perfection. Catastrophe and disorder generate a new order of human and planetary history, and this order in turn retroactively incorporates the original catastrophic contingency into its narrative of self-legitimation, so that contingency turns into necessity: the Fall, so this narrative goes, was necessary for the human nature to exit its immediate state, and to develop.

Hemsterhuis affirms the essential infinity and expansionism or openness of human nature, which is for him one with the openness of the post-Copernican expanse of reality. Considered from the standpoint of totality or the All in its overarching perfection (which persists even if the present state of things deviates from it), all nature is perfect—and if Hemsterhuis holds that human nature has not degenerated, then this is because already in the golden age the human possessed an infinite capacity for perfection, which continues to define it even in its current self-alienated state. In the original state of *plenum*, this infinite capacity simply did not need to develop since reality was likewise infinitely plentiful, and the infinity of the human and the infinity of the productions of the Earth were one. Put

²² An expression from Hemsterhuis’s *Letter on the Rotation of the Planets*, where he speaks of the Moon (or a possible bigger celestial body of which the Moon may have originally been a part) as “the principal cause of the alteration of this globe’s natural state and our temporal misfortunes (*malheurs temporels*)”—of our, as it were, misadventures in temporality. See *IN* 133; translated by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler.

differently, during the original golden age infinite human desire immediately found infinite fulfillment. This was not, moreover, desire for individual things—but, one could say, the desire for infinity itself.

The Fall, creating a new condition of danger and scarcity for all of the Earth's inhabitants, threw the human out of the paradisaical condition into a "finite and determinate world" (*le monde fini & déterminé / die endliche und bestimmte Welt* [*JW* 81 / *EE* 2.144]). In the opposition between paradisaical bliss and "the world," the beginning of world history consists precisely in the *non*-coincidence between desire and fulfillment. The world in its finitude is now perceived by animals and humans as a reality of "defect" or "lack" (*défaut / Mangel*), and as full of "obstacles" to their desires (*JW* 43-4 / *EE* 2.132). Additionally, since reality ceases to be plentiful and the human can no longer immediately satisfy its desire for infinity, the human cannot intuit the omnipresence of the divine in this new threatening reality, sensing the divine instead to be estranged (an estrangement symbolized by the Moon as a counter-solar deity). This phenomenological and material fact corresponds to the previously mentioned loss of the pantheistic sense-organ by the human due to the Fall.²³

The new structure of negativity or lack is what activates, in the planet itself as well as its animal and human inhabitants, the "principle of perfectibility" (*principe de perfectibilité*), which Jacobi translates as "fundamental drive" (*Grundtrieb der Vervollkommenung* [*JW* 23 / *EE* 2.126]). This principle indexes the imbalance or gap between the potential capacity and desire for perfection, on the one hand (as the state in which desire finds total fulfillment), and its lack of actualization or satisfaction, on the other. As long as this imbalance persists, "perfectibility" implies that the being in question is capable of and "anticipates" (and strives for) a better state than its present one (*JW* 23 / *EE* 2.126). Temporally, this means that what used to be immediate, or here and now, becomes a future *telos*, which is constantly reproduced since, in this fallen state, the lack persists and no fulfillment is

²³ Klaus Hammacher interprets Hemsterhuis's insistence on the importance of the material conditions for the development of human faculties as a problematic derivation of the spiritual from the material. See Hammacher, *Unmittelbarkeit und Kritik bei Hemsterhuis* (München: Fink, 1971), 171. At stake, however, is arguably the co-constitution of materiality and consciousness, the real and the ideal. This co-constitution may be understood in different ways: transcendently (in the vein of A.W. Schlegel's characterization of Hemsterhuis as "a prophet of transcendental idealism"), or as a kind of Spinozism, or as a speculative transformation of the empirical and experimental character of modern science (with Hemsterhuis speaking of the importance of the material or "matters" on which the human exercises its faculties for the development or, in the absence of appropriate "matters," stagnation of these faculties). Either way, Hemsterhuis's position is not a crude derivation of spirit from matter.

permanent (especially for the human being, whose desire is infinite). In other words, perfectibility is a drive towards regaining the perfect balance that characterized the original golden age—and, importantly, its temporality is not straightforwardly progressive, but (in Hemsterhuis’s Newtonian system) it orbits and approximates its telos in a kind of elliptical spiral-like loop.

In this looping movement, the concept of the golden age itself starts looping and multiplying as Hemsterhuis’s text, in its enthusiasm for the golden age, keeps circling around this concept and considering it from different angles. In the part of the dialogue that follows the myth, “golden age” is defined by Diocles philosophically as “the state of a being which enjoys all the happiness of which its nature *and current manner of being* are capable” (*JW* 77 / *EE* 2.143; emphasis added). While human nature, as the nature of any other being, is essentially unchangeable, the addition of “current manner of being” opens the possibility of multiple “golden ages”—and indeed, this may explain why towards the end of the dialogue Diocles suddenly starts speaking of the second “golden (or rather, silver) age” right after the Fall (*JW* 84 / *EE* 2.145).

“The silver age” is a reference to Hesiod, whose *Works and Days* is a point of reference throughout the dialogue. However—the reader may ask²⁴—why speak here of the second golden age, and not simply of the silver age? This age, after all, does not seem absolutely perfect; during it, the human exists merely in an animal state and attains only to “an animal perfection” (*JW* 84 / *EE* 2.145). Here instinct reigns, as the immediate coincidence of (finite) wants and their (finite) satisfaction by individual objects. As such, this age cannot satisfy humanity’s desire for infinity. Yet, the point of Hemsterhuis’s conceptual definition of the golden age is precisely to make possible different golden ages for different beings, and for different modes or stages of existence of a particular being, within one historical process. The second golden age, as the golden age of instinct, *is* the golden age for animal beings, whose “principle of perfectibility has a determinate limit” (*JW* 77 / *EE* 2.143). At the same time, it is a *relative* golden age for the human being too, *insofar as* the human exists here at the level of instinct, and so regains—at the lowest level—some of the balance it used to enjoy during the original golden age.²⁵

²⁴ See, e.g., Heinz Moenkemeyer, *François Hemsterhuis* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), 160.

²⁵ A further equivocation should be noted in the concept of the golden age. When speaking of the original golden age, Hemsterhuis relies on poetic myth and astronomy—on traces of a cosmic “revolution” in mythical traditions. In the later part of the dialogue, however (see *JW* 76 / *EE* 2.143ff.), Alexis asks, in an Enlightenment manner, for a purely philosophical definition of the golden age, which Diocles provides (quoted above). Following this line of questioning, Diocles temporarily chooses to forego any reference to myth and asks whether,

The silver age is thus “the moment when man and animal were at the same point, when man was happy as an inhabitant of the Earth” or, in Jacobi’s translation, “when man was content solely with his earthly happiness (*Erdenglücke*)” (*JW* 80 / *EE* 2.144). Unlike the animal, the human, however, cannot be truly satisfied with this (instinctual and finite) animal perfection, and is therefore driven to exit this state—which signals, in an Enlightenment manner, the development of human freedom and reason. The human, therefore, “passed beyond” or, Jacobi writes in a proleptically Romantic formulation, “strove on” (*strebte weiter* [*JW* 80 / *EE* 2.144]) beyond this condition. One could put it this way: human nature is infinite—and accordingly, *out of* the postlapsarian condition of finitude in which it finds itself, the human strives to regain, and is capable of regaining, its original infinity.

With its transcending of the purely instinctual state, however, the human becomes aware of the gap between its desire and the finitude of objects, none of which can truly satisfy the human desire for infinity, which is “vague and indeterminate” (or, as Jacobi translates it, goes *ins Weite* or expands [*JW* 78 / *EE* 2.144]). The human starts to be driven *by* this gap in a desperate attempt to close it—by a dissatisfaction with the “present state” combined with an “innate” hope (*espérance* / *Hoffnung*) and a desire or longing for “a different state” (*JW* 79 / *EE* 2.144) in response to the immanent inner call of the golden age. As a result, the human becomes “an unhappy being on the Earth” (*JW* 84 / *EE* 2.145), estranged from nature (including its own) but still sensing infinity and perfection within itself, entering what may be called an age of unhappiness. Ultimately, even the golden times themselves start to appear to the human as “equally alien” (*gleich fremde* / *également étrangères*), so that the human ceases to know any condition other than the present, unsatisfactory one. A threefold structure of alienation or contradiction emerges here as defining the fallen human condition: alienation from

“without regard to traditions or to divine inspiration,” one can discern the possibility of a golden age based “solely [on] the nature of man we know it” (*EE* 2.143). It is then from the present, postlapsarian human nature that Diocles deduces the “golden (or rather, silver) age” as a golden age of instinct and animal perfection, followed by the development of reason and freedom. The original, prelapsarian golden age cannot be deduced philosophically based on “the nature of man as we know it”; it can only be intuited via poetry. There is thus a bifurcation at this point in *Alexis* with regard to what constitutes the first golden age. From a philosophical standpoint, the original absolute golden age is a poetic fiction (it is merely “figurative” from a philosophical point of view [*JW* 77 / *EE* 2.143]), and the first rationally deducible golden age corresponds to Hesiod’s silver age. From the standpoint of poetry, however, which is ultimately affirmed in *Alexis* as the higher standpoint, the original golden age is a fundamental truth, which philosophical reason only seeks to approximate, so that what for philosophy is the first (golden) age emerges from the standpoint of poetry as, in truth, the second (silver) age.

itself, from nature, and from God. This structure splits the divine itself in two: into the false idea of the good and the evil principle, whose struggle Hemsterhuis sees as permeating human consciousness after the Fall, and as leading the human to believe dualistically in “the marvelous” over and against the natural world (*JW* 58 / *EE* 2.137).

During the dark age of unhappiness, the human may dimly sense but does not know its true nature and destiny. This knowledge is gained gradually, and the figure of the enlightened wise or sage (*le sage / der Weise*) is central here for Hemsterhuis. This figure’s role is ultimately theodical: it is rational reconciliation with the fallen condition, and with the course of the world. On the one hand, the wise learns to find the beautiful (*le beau / das Schöne*) and the sublime (*le sublime / das Erhabene*) in the threatening and contingent external world, while regarding the golden age as a tale that is far removed from the realities of human nature.²⁶ The wise teaches humanity to find beauty and meaning in finitude and contingency, and this is the beginning of what may be called the age of enlightenment, in which humanity starts to know itself and to find its way (*se reconnoître / sich zurecht finden* [*JW* 58 / *EE* 2.137]).

Moreover, instead of nostalgia for a past bliss, and instead of belief in the marvelous, the wise seeks to discern *in the present*, and in the course of history, that which would connect the present to the better future. The wise discerns in the infinity of human desire the future destiny of humanity, and thus the ground for rational *hope* (this essential principle of eighteenth-century theodicy) in the face of the presently negative state of humanity and the world. In enlightening humanity about its true infinite nature, the wise gradually reconciles not only alienation from the world, but human self-alienation. The human, writes Hemsterhuis, was “an unhappy being on the Earth, until the wise taught him by an enlightened philosophy to link again the present to the future and to recognize the homogeneity of his eternal existence”—i.e., the infinite oneness of human nature (*JW* 84 / *EE* 2.146). The implied *continuity* of human development which the wise restores is important, since it allows to rationally re-mediate the vague longing for the golden age into a historical path towards it as transposed into the absolute future. In this way, theodical reconciliation occurs with the negative or fallen state of the world, and the perceived present evils that plague humanity. Through the development of reason and the sciences, a golden age can be reached that would incorporate all the powers that humanity develops over

²⁶ This may be regarded as the beginning of the “enlightened” philosophical standpoint from which the original golden age appears as a mythical or “figural” tale (a standpoint described in the previous footnote).

the course of world history. It is precisely from the perspective of this development and this higher state that the Fall emerges, retrospectively, as a fortunate Fall.

This perspective coincides, furthermore, with the standpoint of the cosmic whole in its perfection, from which the presently self-divided state of humanity appears as but a temporary deviation (“merely an accidental appearance” [JW 82 / EE 2.145]) or an eccentric path towards perfection. This, too, is a traditional theodical motif: evil and negativity may appear to be ubiquitous and insurmountable if we focus myopically on the present, but if we elevate ourselves to the cosmic standpoint, we can see that they are insignificant or even useful and have their place, and are therefore justified, within the coherence of the whole. For Hemsterhuis, the development of reason and the sciences towards their future perfection proceeds precisely under the guidance of an immediate sense of the universe in its divine wholeness. In a proto-Romantic move, this sense is for him provided, however, not by enlightened philosophy but by poetry and enthusiasm; in fact, innate human longing for the better state and the wise person’s rational hope in it are both ultimately grounded in the intuition of the universe to which “enthusiasm,” as Hemsterhuis understands it, transports us.

The concept of enthusiasm in Hemsterhuis anticipates proleptically the Romantic ideas of prophecy and intellectual intuition. For Hemsterhuis, it is only possible to grasp the whole and the true immediately, and not based on selfhood or intellect (*l’intellect / Verstand*). Enthusiasm dispossesses the finite self and, as if carried by an unknown force (the divine or solar power), we become in it immediately one with “the bosom (*sein / Schooße*) of nature”²⁷ or catch its “spark,” which shoots through us like lightning (*foudre / Blitz* [JW 70 / EE 2.141]). Enthusiasm acts like divine inspiration, and cannot be reduced to the work of one’s imagination or one’s conscious effort. It functions absolutely “without any effort (*effort / Anstrengung*)” or “without work (*travail / Arbeit*)” (JW 73 / EE 2.142), transporting us immediately to the standpoint of the golden age in which all being—the All itself—simply is, without striving or lack, and in which we sense the omnipresence of “a Divinity” (JW 74 / EE 2.142).²⁸ This is precisely the standpoint of poetry: the “fecund source of true poetry” (JW 75 / EE 2.143), coinciding with what

²⁷ The same cosmic *sein de la nature* from which the Earth itself originates (JW 20 / EE 2.125). The human, the planet, and the universe are immediately joined in this cross-scalar intellectual intuition.

²⁸ Cf. the earlier description of the golden age as “a perfect rest without work and without trouble” (JW 18 / EE 2.124). As Hemsterhuis writes elsewhere, the universe considered as a whole is likewise characterized by “the most perfect rest” (EE 2.75 / OP 426).

is absolutely true and absolutely real. This poetic seeing sees even into the future (*JW* 74 / *EE* 2.142), and this underlies the operation of divination or prophecy. What it divines is the absolute state, the new golden age, from the perspective of which all present negativity disappears: a poetic or aesthetic cosmic theodicy that would resonate throughout Romanticism, too.

“I sense,” proclaims Alexis in response to Diocles’s explanation of enthusiasm, “that the most profound reasoning (*raisonnement* / *Schlüsse*), the wisest and most reflective march of the intellect, would supply us with very few new truths, if it were not sustained, directed or pushed by this enthusiasm” (*JW* 74 / *EE* 2.142). This is the sense in which even the rational hope and enlightenment offered by the wise, as well as the development of the sciences, are upheld or sustained (*soutenu* / *unterstützt*) by the immediate intuition of the All. The capacity for such enthusiasm, in its oneness with the absolute, may itself be regarded as a trace of the golden age within us. This trace of bliss may be repressed by the postlapsarian world of division and alienation, and yet it is on what is immediately accessed in enthusiasm—on the bliss of the golden age—that this world lives and feeds. What is accessed in enthusiasm is at once divine and sublime (and thus higher than the world), and remains *below* as that on which the world is imposed and which upholds from below (*unter-stützt*) the rational course of the world and the soul’s longing. This coincidence of the above and the below is cosmic, too: the light of the Sun and the darkness of the universal expanse as the two poles of the universe.

4. Terrestrial and Cosmic Reconciliation—and Its Theodical Pitfalls

The philosopher and the poet conjointly help to reconcile the divided world: the former through learning (and teaching) rationally to discern the true character of human existence and to approximate the better future; the second through intuiting immediately the divine and the golden age, and thus uniting with and upholding the absolute source and direction of desire. In the end, in the final golden age, all the sciences, proclaims Diocles, will develop to such an extent that they will flow into one perfectly immediate knowledge. Behind this idea stands an important intuition: the purpose of knowledge *qua* mediation is to bring together what is divided and not already one. The sciences, as based on mediation and reflection, are already part of the postlapsarian structure of reality and knowledge; in the original golden age, knowledge is immediate and perfect, and no mediation is necessary. This kind of immediacy is what mediation seeks to approximate—so that, when it reaches perfection and becomes instantaneous (or finds no obstacle in reality

anymore), mediation itself turns into immediacy. This idea, which would later be central for the Romantics and Hegel (in particular, in his idea of *der freie Geist* as finding no opposition from reality), may be said to mark the ultimate desire of the post-Copernican cosmically alienated subject: to finally feel at home in a universe that would no longer be perceived as threatening and alien.

In this final reconciled state, division and alienation are overcome from within, the human becomes one with the infinite reality, and science coincides with poetry. “When it comes to the [final] golden age of man after this life,” speaks Hemsterhuis of humanity’s cosmic destiny, “his joys there will be more intimate, more coherent”—one with the harmony of the All—“and all his knowledges (*connoissances* / *Kenntnisse*) will be joined together, like the colours of the rainbow are mixed in the heart of a crystal and form together just one pure light.” In this, human spirit will finally reach the kind of solar perfection around which all human history and all planetary desire elliptically orbit, with the “pure light” of absolute knowledge constituting “the perfect image of that shining star which bore them”—i.e., the colors but also the human knowledges—“in its bosom” (*JW* 85 / *EE* 2.146).

The becoming-one of human spirit with the Sun is premised, however, on its becoming-one or harmonious with the Earth. At this point, as Hans-Joachim Mähl observes, the future golden age bifurcates in Hemsterhuis, too: the final golden age *beyond* this Earth (hence “after this life” in the above quotation) is premised on the smaller-scale planetary golden age in harmony *with* the Earth.²⁹ In *Alexis* and other writings, Hemsterhuis suggests that human desire and potential are too infinite to be confined solely to this planet, and that the human is a being whose evolution is not only terrestrial but cosmic—an idea that was also important for Herder, and that would become an integral part of Romantic cosmism. For Hemsterhuis, the Earth serves as the first training ground for the development of human powers, but while this ground is limited, human powers are potentially unlimited and their expansive actualization cannot be contained. Here on the Earth, he asserts in a text from the early 1780s, the human is “a bird of passage, or rather a being who, by some unknown law, has clung to [earthly] matter for a bit of time to exercise his faculties, as he will probably exercise them in other categories on totally different matters” (*IN* 61).³⁰ As an inhabitant of the Earth, the human only has “a small number of organs,” writes Hemsterhuis in a letter from 1780, and cannot develop the infinity of faculties

²⁹ Cf. Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, 277-8, who counts four golden ages in *Alexis*.

³⁰ Translated by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler.

of which its nature is capable.³¹ Similarly, in Diocles's prophetic speech at the end of *Alexis* (see *JW* 84-5 / *EE* 2.146), the invocation of the final cosmic golden age "after this life" is preceded by the depiction of the terrestrial golden age—called the "third [golden] age"—in which the human reaches the highest knowledge and highest happiness allowed by "his current organs," and by "what he can enjoy on the Earth."

In an Enlightenment and proto-environmentalist manner, for the terrestrial golden age to be attained, the human must *temper* its infinite desire, elliptically retrace its steps, and recognize the limitations of the Earth's resources and of humanity's earthly existence. This golden age "will take place," Diocles points out, "when [the human] distinctly sees the limits of his intelligence with regard to the aspects of the universe that he can know" from the Earth, and "when he perceives the absurd disproportion between his desires and what he can enjoy on the Earth" and so "finds a salutary and just equilibrium (*équilibre / Gleichgewicht*) between his desires and the objects placed in the sphere of his current activity"—an equilibrium "enriched by all the insight of which his nature here below is capable" (*JW* 84-5 / *EE* 2.146).³² The history of global humanity and planetary history culminate jointly in a new equilibrium, a regained state of verticality in which the Earth itself would find a new balance and restore its tilted axis.

This equilibrium is not easy for the human to attain, and in fact its entire history seems to contradict the possibility of reaching this state. As Hemsterhuis describes powerfully earlier in the dialogue, during the age of unhappiness, the human is filled with an insatiable thirst for possession and expansion—"in the vain and mad hope of finding in the quantity of these finite and determinate objects" the "analogue" to the infinite perfection for which its nature longs (*JW* 81 / *EE* 2.145). The highly modern understanding of the human nature as driven to expand into infinity, and to master all dimensions or scales of possibility—the depths of the Earth (the planetary) and the entire surface of the globe (the global) no less than the expanse of the skies (the cosmic)—determines for Hemsterhuis the course of human development starting from this age:

...as soon as he [i.e., man] measured the heavens, crossed the seas, drew metals from the depths of the Earth to decorate his figure, to destroy his brothers or to forge signs for the property he had claimed; as soon as he formed states, prescribed laws and, at the height of absurdity, wanted

³¹ Quoted in Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, 274.

³² Note the relative character of this terrestrial golden age again through the qualifications such as "current activity" and "here below."

only one man to be the proprietor of millions of his fellow men... immediately all the madness, the horrors and the disorders, the absurdities and the inconsistencies... had to naturally manifest themselves, while at the same time demonstrating to man, in the most perfect way, the nobility and stability of his nature and that his bastardisation was merely an accidental appearance. (*JW* 81-2 / *EE* 2.145)

This passage may seem paradoxical, but its theodical twist—according to which in the evils themselves one discerns the noble and the good—reiterates the familiar logic: the infinity of human desires discloses the desire for infinity inherent in human nature. This is precisely what the enlightened sage can discern “in the most perfect way,” so that enlightenment may be said to consist for Hemsterhuis in recognizing at once the infinite nature *and* the present incompleteness of the human in its earthly state, and in teaching humanity to temper its desires accordingly so as to regain balance. Implied in this entire logic, furthermore, is the assumption on which modern science from Francis Bacon onwards is premised: that as human knowledge of reality and mastery over reality grow, material reality changes too, becoming less threatening and serving for the exercise of human faculties that is so important to Hemsterhuis. In this process, the emerging consciousness of oneness—of the one human nature, and of a necessary oneness with the Earth—is provided with material and phenomenological conditions of possibility. The excesses of the thirst for power, possession, and expansion are thus justified by Hemsterhuis as subservient to the noble end goal of reconciliation and oneness, and as that *through* which the human’s true nature is “demonstrated.”

Although the dialogue is set in antiquity, it speaks also, by way of the classical age of Greek philosophy, of and to the modern age of Enlightenment—setting up a post-Newtonian vision of universal history, and a poetic and philosophical program for enlightenment as the human and cosmic imperative. Taken together, the motifs of endless striving and limitless possession, of the infinite expansionism of mastery and desire, of theodical hope in the future and finding sublimity even in contingency and finitude, and finally of enlightenment itself, and of overcoming the belief in dualism, miracles, and the supernatural, form a nexus that resonates throughout eighteenth-century thought. And although Hemsterhuis speaks simply of human global history, and of global humanity, the implied subject of this process is the modern Western subject of ceaseless striving, expansion, and mastery, of infinite development and forward movement. What Blumenberg calls the “existential program” of Western modernity—the “self-

assertion of reason through the mastery and alteration of reality”³³—is configured by Hemsterhuis as the assertion by the human of its higher, infinite essence. The age of enlightenment is when this self-assertion becomes (self-)conscious. This creates a dialectical structure of self-reflection, in which humanity reflects its endless outward desire inward and returns to itself, learning its own true nature and limits.

Yet, it is only as this infinitely expansionist subject that the human, or humanity as a whole, can discover its true nature and destiny, and the Earth can restore its tilted axis. The striving of the planet, Hemsterhuis implies, is one with the striving of *this* normative subject, who thereby acquires a truly planetary and cosmic significance. The Earth is proclaimed, in the same move, to be but the training ground for this subject’s exercise of its powers. And even if one reads it most radically as implying that intelligence is a planetary-scale phenomenon and consciousness itself is planetary, or that, as Novalis would say, “humanity is the higher sense-organ of our planet, the eye which our planet raises to the sky, the nerve which connects this part [of the universal organism] to the world above”³⁴—still, it is the modern subject, its retroactive construction of its own history as universal history, and its global project of enlightenment that are implied, in both Hemsterhuis and Novalis,³⁵ to carry planetary intelligence and to constitute the “higher” organ of the planet.

In a way that reflects the broader logics of the modern colonial construction of “humanity” as a global category from the Western center, the affirmation of the normative subject of world history (“the human” or “man”) is also imbricated in Hemsterhuis with the denigration or exclusion of those who remain at the less-than-human or nonhuman level.³⁶ One may recall here Hemsterhuis’s idea of the silver age as that of lower, merely “animal perfection.” Seeing as the principle of perfectibility is inherent in both animal and human nature, the human is distinguished not so much by perfectibility but by the *infinity* thereof. The human, as Hemsterhuis defines it, can never be satisfied with a given sphere of existence, but seeks constantly to transcend its present boundaries, and to expand possessively onto all reality. Whoever is *not* like that, then, whoever rests content or does nothing instead of constantly striving forward, is lower or less than human. In his

³³ Blumenberg, *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 137.

³⁴ Novalis, *Werke*, 2:354.

³⁵ Cf. Novalis’s 1799 “Christianity, or Europe,” which proclaims the task of universal enlightenment as the (Christian-modern) European task.

³⁶ On this logic in modernity see Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being / Power / Truth / Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003), 257-337.

Reflections on the Republic of the United Provinces, this normative construction of global humanity becomes explicit, with Hemsterhuis speaking about “those peoples who inhabit islands, or who are scarcely exposed to passages or to expeditions from abroad” as ones who persist in “barbaric simplicity” (*IN* 68)³⁷—i.e., in a quasi-silver age outside the movement of world history (a movement that has already progressed past the “animal” stage in which these peoples remain stuck). As a result, a whole nexus of colonial dimensions of barbarism, childhood, and indolence, typical for Enlightenment thought, haunts Hemsterhuis’s vision of the ages of the world.

In a conceptual sleight of hand, in Hemsterhuis’s construction of human nature the expansionist “vague and indeterminate” desire is theodically reconfigured and extolled as desire *for* infinity, for a higher state or something universally better, instead of being seen for what it arguably is: expansionism for the sake of expansionism and possession for the sake of possession, a futile attempt to fill the void of post-Copernican cosmic alienation at the heart of modern subjectivity, and to impossibly re-assert “man” at the center of infinite post-Copernican reality. Within this structure of striving which constitutively has no end, it is no wonder that all fulfillment, happiness, and desire are transitory and fleeting, except the desire *to* desire endlessly—and that Hemsterhuis transposes conclusive fulfillment into the faraway cosmic stage of human evolution or even into the next life.

More generally, the entire narrative that Hemsterhuis constructs could serve as a fitting allegory for post-Copernican modernity itself. With the Copernican Revolution the subject is suddenly and catastrophically severed from the pre-given cosmic order and thrust into an infinitely contingent universe—onto a newly de-centered planet, and into a de-centered abyss of contingency whose horror (and the resulting structure of loss) Johannes Kepler and John Donne invoke already at the start of the seventeenth century. The modern process of the self-assertion of reason may be said to constitute the striving to rationally re-mediate the “fallen” reality in which the subject finds itself, to find meaning in it, and to gain firm footing vis-à-vis the threatening universe. Not unlike in Hemsterhuis’s description of the Fall, death, too, seems stripped of meaning in a universe that has no higher spheres in which the dead could dwell. The Copernican event is a cosmic catastrophe, after which there is no return to the perceived harmony of the pre-modern cosmos, only endless alienation and ceaseless self-assertion over and against the newly opened abyss.³⁸ In this process, the subject seeks to

³⁷ Translated by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler.

³⁸ By setting *Alexis* in the supposedly harmonic age of classical antiquity, too, Hemsterhuis may be taken to perform the modern nostalgia for a golden age of nonalienation, or for a

measure, appropriate, and master the infinite expanse of reality, and thereby to regain, step by step, stability and hope—so as to find harmony with the de-centered Earth and ultimately to be at home in the post-Copernican universe. Such is, precisely, the future envisioned by *Alexis*.

Hegel's later dictum that world history is a theodicy, i.e., an unfolding of what is divine or higher through negativity and suffering, applies likewise to Hemsterhuis's construction of the ages of the world. One may disagree over the question of how many ages of history in total are to be discerned in this construction. Most broadly, the answer may be three ages (paradise—fall—reconciliation and restoration). In keeping with Hesiod's *Works and Days* as the explicit point of reference for *Alexis*, one may count five ages total, but even so one may count them differently.³⁹ Furthermore, since the Fall itself has duration and is depicted by Hemsterhuis as a period of change, one could end up with as many as seven epochs: the original golden age; the Fall; the silver age; the age of unhappiness; the age of enlightenment; the new terrestrial golden age; the final cosmic golden age. This would make the culmination of human history coincide with a kind of cosmic Sabbath, the epoch of cosmic bliss and tranquility, one with the true state of the universal All in its "most perfect rest (*repos / Ruhe*)" (*EE* 2.75 / *OP* 426-7). In this final age, the omnipresence of divinity, lost with the original golden age, would be restored, too, in a cosmic pantheism of divine repose.

5. The Golden Age vs. the World: A Coda

No matter how many ages of the world one counts in *Alexis*, the final theodical ruse in Hemsterhuis's construction remains the same: it is the very inscription of the golden age as ideal into the movement of the world so as to justify this movement. Within world history, Hemsterhuis claims, one can discern the ideal of the golden age as that towards which this history, despite its evils, has always already been directed. At each stage, history (as the history of human striving too) is driven by the golden age reconfigured as the telos which can only be reached *through* the movement of history. As a result, the logic of periodization itself is revealed to be theodical, all evil and suffering

cosmic order that, as a result of the catastrophic shock of the Copernican event, modernity lost.

³⁹ The sequence could be, for instance, the original golden age; the second golden (silver) age; the age of unhappiness; the age of enlightenment; the new golden age. Or, alternatively, the original golden age; the silver age; the age of fallenness (encompassing the entirety of history since the Fall); the new terrestrial golden age; the final cosmic golden age.

turn out to be a temporary deviation, and the universe turns out to be perfect and to require no redemption.

This kind of inscription of the a-worldly bliss of the golden age into the movement of the world, which is also foundational for much of Romantic and Idealist philosophy of history, is not as natural as it might appear; the idea of the golden age could instead just as easily be directed *against* human history and the world. Considered immanently, the golden age is ahistorical and utopic, without any processuality or striving. As such, it names an ante-original site discontinuous with the logic of world history (a discontinuity signaled by the event of the Fall), and something that has never fully existed in history. It is a nonplace from the perspective of history—a nonplace that, in poetic intuition, is revealed to be cosmically-real. It indexes thus a utopic cosmic site opposed to the evils of history. Even if one says with Hemsterhuis that history has always orbited elliptically around this utopic nonplace as the site of perfection, this site could still serve to index that which the world is *not*, and thus a “no” to the world as it is. The figure of the golden age cannot but arise, after all, out of a deep dissatisfaction with the way things are. The golden age is immanently antagonistic to the world, and in particular to the modern alienated world of endless striving and work. What is imagined in the figure of the golden age is *fulfillment in the now*. Yet, in this world, the demand of fulfillment right now is impossible. As a result, from the perspective of the subject’s striving in the world, the golden age can only appear as a lost past bliss or a future bliss to be regained, creating the (highly Romantic) affective mixture of ceaseless longing, nostalgia, and anticipation. To justify the world as this endless in-between, in which bliss is irretrievably lost, and in which fulfillment is promised but never comes (except perhaps in the next life), is the central task of theodicy.

In other words, the idea of the golden age threatens to delegitimize the world—and it is to prevent the golden age from being a figure of world-delegitimation that Hemsterhuis turns it into a figure of world-legitimation, inscribing it into the logic of history and futurity. The resulting theodicy functions across scales: the cosmic and the planetary are in it mobilized jointly to legitimate the history of global humanity, and to position the modern global subject as a truly cosmic being. The horror of cosmic contingency is defused by making the Fall, and the history that follows, useful for humanity’s development, and for reaching the higher state. Even death is stripped of its threatening contingency and finality by the doctrine of metempsychosis, which Hemsterhuis merges with the idea of progressive evolution of humanity. This doctrine serves perhaps another implicit goal: to affirm that, even if another cosmic contingency were to befall the Earth or if

the Earth were to collide with a comet (a possibility that was very much on the minds of Hemsterhuis's contemporaries), this would not have to result in human extinction or an irreparable setback in humanity's development—since humanity in its evolution transcends this planet, and transcends death itself.

In his theodicy, Hemsterhuis seeks to exorcize the specter of Gnosticism by affirming the goodness of the universe over and against the cosmic contingency embodied by the Moon, this “evil” demiurge and principle of darkness, in her eternally useless exclusion and cosmic failure. Perhaps, however, there is a way to imagine a different conception of the golden age from the standpoint of the Moon—a queer lunar bliss that would be premised not on “educating” the Moon, thereby reiterating the logic of human self-assertion, but on the kind of inhabitation of the post-Copernican universe that would embrace immanently its infinite contingency as carrying with itself the possibility of nonproductivity, uselessness, and failure. In a universe in which even the Sun is destined to be extinguished, it is perhaps what is eternally useless, and what embodies at once the striving *and* the reality of its failure, that should be identified with what is cosmically-real. To affirm the human, and the modern subject of self-assertion (“man”), as a cosmic being or planetary intelligence would be, from this perspective, not to reinstate the modern global subject at the center of the universe or to proclaim this subject's inevitable noble destiny in inhabiting the stars, transcending death, and seeing the universe “in the manner of the Gods” (*EE* 2.121; *OP* 572-3). It would mean rather to inhabit immanently the de-centeredness of humanity and the Earth in their frangible interconnection, and to see in present humanity, as Friedrich Schlegel suggests in his notebooks, a cosmic experiment (*Versuch*) that might ultimately fail.⁴⁰ To proceed immanently from the perspective of cosmic failure without the anxiety of self-assertion would not mean to stop humanity's cross-scalar experiments, or to stop seeing modern humanity itself as an important cross-scalar experiment—but, on the contrary, to open up a conceptual and poetic *Spielraum* for what is antagonistic to or comes after the world of modernity, and for what re-visions the global from a cosmic standpoint without justifying this world as the best possible. This too would imply that the world requires no redemption, but in a different, anti-theodical sense: as the refusal of spiritual and cosmic investment in this world, since it does *not* have to be the way it is.

⁴⁰ See Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, vol. 18, ed. Ernst Behler (München-Paderborn-Wien: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1963), 192: “Could it not be, perhaps, that human history will find a truly miserable end, half-tragic, half-comedic, so that nothing will emerge from it.”

Elsewhere, Schlegel envisions evocatively that, once this attempt comes to an end, the spirit of humanity will become one with the Sun whereas its material “cinders” will form a new Moon-like body and be expelled into the extra-terrestrial expanse.⁴¹ Speculatively, this reads almost like a reconfiguration of the story of the Moon from *Alexis*, so that one may ask: what if that was how our Moon originated too, as a material fragment of an even earlier failure? And what if to become one with the Sun is not to master the universe in the manner of the Gods, but to re-vision it from a standpoint that equates experimentation, irony, and contingency with what is cosmically-real, and from the perspective of the phoenix-like processuality of the universe in which the end of one cosmic world is but the beginning of another? It may be that what must be accessed in poetic enthusiasm—and this is where the Romantics go beyond Hemsterhuis—is not just the golden age but the deeper cosmic contingency and disorder which underlie it and out of which it emerges, and which break through in the Fall and the sudden emergence of the Moon. If, as Schlegel says echoing Hemsterhuis, “the sole principle of poetry is enthusiasm,” then (Schlegel continues) poetry can only embody it by being one with the “fury of physics (*Wuth der Physik*),” with the geo-cosmic disorder and turmoil of the planet and the universe.⁴² And if the wise in Hemsterhuis is one who discerns beauty in contingency, then philosophy, too, instead of upholding the Enlightenment project of self-assertion, might join poetry in affirming cosmic experimentation and irony. This is what it might mean to reconfigure philosophy and poetry from the standpoint of the Moon, or of the deeper unity of the Sun and the Moon as symbolizing two interrelated aspects of the one infinite universe. This standpoint which Hemsterhuis approaches but does not quite reach is, I would suggest, where Romantic cosmism begins.

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⁴¹ Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 18: 163. Schlegel, however, seems to subscribe in these notes not to the capture theory but a co-formation theory of the origin of the Moon.

⁴² Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 16: 282.

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Translations

Übersetzungen

Traductions

Traduzioni

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Letters on Prometheus

François Hemsterhuis

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Daniel Whistler*

Prometheus is one of the more significant figures in Hemsterhuis's philosophical mythology. The Titan who stole fire from Olympus to bring the human race to life occupies a central place in the dialogue, *Simon ou des facultés de l'âme*. Here he undergoes a metamorphosis, losing much of his backstory (as Zeus's embittered rival) and even his fate (his liver eaten interminably by an eagle in the Caucasus) to become, instead, a creator-deity who builds the faculties of the human mind, as the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* constructs nature. Indeed, whenever Hemsterhuis speaks of Prometheus, he has Plato on his mind: *Simon* ultimately attempts to rewrite the Prometheus-myth from Plato's *Protagoras* in order to answer its guiding question anew: can virtue be taught?

The translations that follows consist of extracts from five letters written to Amalie Gallitzin (the 'Diotima' to Hemsterhuis's 'Socrates').¹ Three of the letters were written in 1780 when Hemsterhuis was immersed in the composition of *Simon* and the other two date from 1786 when Hemsterhuis had become embroiled in the German *Spinozismusstreit*—encountering Goethe's *Prometheus* poem in Jacobi's *Über Die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*.² These translations are intended to shed light not only on

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¹ Unfortunately, Gallitzin's responses are either no longer extant or do not focus on Hemsterhuis's discussion of Prometheus, and so are not included in the below. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise the extent to which Hemsterhuis's thinking after 1775 was the product of *symphilosophische* collaboration with her.

² The translations are based on the text established in François Hemsterhuis, *Briefwisseling (Hemsterhuisiana)*, 13 vols, ed. Jacob van Sluis (Berltsum, 2011-17) [Henceforth cited in-text

the genesis of Hemsterhuis's own late philosophy (particularly that dialogue Schlegel described as 'Socratic poetry'³), but also on his reaction to the German poetry and philosophy of the period. And, on this basis, the ultimate aim is to exhibit some of the connections that hold between Hemsterhuis's own philosophy and its German reception.

Prometheus plays two roles in *Simon*. He first appears in a 'beautiful group in bronze... which represents Prometheus forming the first man' that had been sculpted by the character, Mnesarchus. The sculpture expresses both 'a deep and attentive genius in Prometheus's physiognomy and attitude' and 'that air of candour, of naivety and of astonishment in the new-born' human prior to receipt of Prometheus's gift (*EE* 2.103). It is this sculpture that triggers the rest of the discussion, particularly its thematic concern with the relation between the inner and the outer in aesthetic creation and human behaviour. That is, the sculpture provokes Aristophanes' challenge—that Prometheus is guilty of creating 'man all wrong by putting what ought to be inside outside and what should be outside inside' (*EE* 2.103). It is for this reason Prometheus makes his second appearance in Diotima's Prometheus-myth which serves as an introduction to Hemsterhuis's own faculty-psychology.

The letters below give a hint of the genesis of Hemsterhuis's thinking on this subject—a shift away from some of the more popular conceptions of Prometheus in the eighteenth century, whether that be the traditional image of Prometheus as a hubristic transgressor of divine and natural law, the proto-Shelleyan image of Prometheus as heroic martyr suffering out of love for humanity, or the Rousseauian image of Prometheus (developed in the opening to the 1749 *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*) as the cause of humanity's woes. Hemsterhuis's Prometheus is more gift-giver than thief or trickster. Moreover, the reference to Rousseau is particularly significant given the frontispiece to the first *Discours* displays a picture of Prometheus warning against touching the heavenly fire and so becoming 'seduced by the brilliance of letters and... study'—an affliction to which he then subjects humanity. The Prometheus sketched in Rousseau's *Discours* reveals himself to be 'a god hostile to men's peace and quiet [as] the inventor of the sciences', i.e.,

as *B*]. The letters translated are 3.22, 3.24, 3.36, 7.29, 7.53. A series of notes and clarifications on the two largest extracts are provided in François Hemsterhuis, *Lettres de Socrate à Diotime: Cent cinquante lettres du philosophe néerlandais Frans Hemsterhuis à la Princesse de Gallitzin*, ed. Marcel F. Fresco (Frankfurt am Main: Hansel-Hohenhausen, 2007), 231-3, 402-5.

³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al. (Munich: Schöningh, 1958-2002), 1.244.

responsible for humanity's corruption and decadence.⁴ It is for this reason that Hemsterhuis's own drawings (referred to and included in these letters) should be read, very literally, as an attempt *to see Prometheus differently*, to counter the Rousseauian narrative of decadence. Through his drawings, Hemsterhuis refigures Prometheus against Rousseau and, in so doing, signals his intent to redeem human knowledge and art.

This is the intellectual context to Hemsterhuis's encounter with Goethe's *Prometheus* poem in December 1785 (when he first reads Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe*) and then in July 1786 (when he returns to it alongside Jacobi's recently published *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen*). Of course, like most of his contemporaries, Hemsterhuis was unaware that Goethe was the author of this poem: Jacobi presents it anonymously on a detachable, separated-off page of his book without noting author, title, content or context. Its role is nevertheless essential to the whole controversy: Jacobi presents the poem to Lessing in Wolfenbüttel in June 1780 as a 'scandal', but Lessing is not scandalised; instead, Jacobi reports him as responding, 'The point of view from which the poem is treated is my own point of view... The orthodox concepts of the Divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stomach them. *Hen kai pan!* I know of nothing else. That is also the direction of the poem, and I must confess that I like it very much.'⁵ Lessing embraces what he perceives as a crypto-Spinozism implicit in the poem's tirade against the gods ('Miserably you feed / Your greatness / On tithes of sacrifice') and its subsequent resolution to create in humanity a race indifferent to them ('To pay you no regard').⁶

Two closely related features of Hemsterhuis's reaction to Goethe's poem are worth noting. First, Hemsterhuis's initial enthusiasm for the poem's style is framed around a comparison to Euripides. And what is striking is that (seemingly coincidentally) Hemsterhuis goes on to interpret other works by Goethe according to the very same frame of reference. Hence, he remarks to Gallitzin in March 1788 after reading Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, 'I do not conceive how Goethe was able to so perfectly capture Euripides' tone, unless there was a time in his life when he read Greek as his own language.' (B 9.22) The Goethe-Euripides affinity remains constant, even if unknowingly so.

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2, 16.

⁵ F. H. Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, ed. and trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), 187.

⁶ Translation by Jeremy Walker in Jacobi, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 185-6.

Secondly, there is something jarring about Hemsterhuis's rather pedantic response to Goethe's poem with its focus on the erudite details of Greek theogony. Hemsterhuis's antiquarianism seems to miss the point, to betray a generational difference between a philological and an 'inspired' reaction to the material. However, one further piece of context helps make some sense of it—Hemsterhuis's recurring anxiety over Goethe's neglect of the letter of art for its spirit, i.e., his privileging of inner meaning over antiquarian and philological 'facts' that determine this meaning.⁷ According to Hemsterhuis, one should never bypass such 'facts', just as one should not remain content with them alone. He worries, then, that Goethe's 'genius' is dangerous insofar as it eschews 'thorough reading' (*B* 9.19). What emerges here—and is performed in the letters below—is a specific hermeneutic model further enriched by noting the constitutive role that drawing and sketching play in these reflections on Prometheus.⁸ The philosopher and the poet must become philologist and draughtsman too, for spirit cannot be separated from, but is instead constituted by both antiquarian attention to the letter and artistic performance of the line.

⁷ On this discussion, see further Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 36-8.

⁸ The constitutive role of thinking-through-drawing in Hemsterhuis's philosophising has long been emphasised by Peter Sonderren—see, e.g., 'Hemsterhuis's Art and Aesthetics: Theories in the Making', in François Hemsterhuis, *Early Writings, 1762–1773*, ed. and trans. Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 3–22.



The Hague, 12th March 1780

My very dear Diotima. Pardon me for this scribble. I was about to write to you when my mind—pregnant with who knows what—gave birth to this strange composition of Prometheus, instead of any words. As it happened to be right in the middle of the paper, I am continuing on the same page and you can take my Titan for an ornament, if you like. [...]

Goodbye my very dear Diotima, as soon as I feel better, I will write better. Embrace my Mimi and my Mitri¹ on behalf of

Σωκράτης²

★

¹ Gallitzin's children, Marianne and Dmitri.

² 'Socrates'

The Hague, 19th March 1780

My very dear Diotima [...]

That Prometheus pleases you pleases me. It could certainly adorn *Simon*, for I am quite content with the composition.³

[...]

★

The Hague, 26th April 1780

My very dear Diotima [...]

Something very peculiar happened to me. A little while ago I had envisaged a composition to represent Prometheus's punishment and was quite content with it. Since then, I have wanted one for a Prometheus who creates man and gives him intelligence. I think I've made more than 20 drawings in spare moments which displease me, since all of them merely showed a man making a statue and so represented some sculptor and not our famous Titan. This morning, annoyed at how little success I'd been having, I threw my sketches into the fire, and a moment later Mr Millotti⁴ was announced to me: you met [him] at Niethuis.⁵ He had come from Italy to show me some gemstones. The first which fell into my hands was Prometheus in an attitude I'd never seen him in before. After having constructed man's frame, he communicates to him intelligence and life by touching [man's] head with his finger, and the little skeleton thanks him for this benefaction.⁶ I need not tell you that it is solely a Greek artist who could have thought in this way. The stone is very small. I might send you a reproduction, but I don't want to because this reproduction is very bad—the stone having been badly damaged. But when you see it (it's a small onyx), you'll find it steeped in spirit. It is a Greek work of the highest antiquity and of the same style as the two heroes in emerald that you have spoken of. If I have any time soon, I'll draw a little sketch so that you can judge the spirit of the stone [for yourself].

³ Hemsterhuis never prepared *Simon* for publication himself, so, unlike many of his other works, no vignettes or sketches were ultimately included with it.

⁴ Millotti was a Florentine antiquarian in the service of Maria Teresa, Empress of the Holy Roman Empire, and mentioned in catalogues of engraved gemstones across Europe.

⁵ Gallitzin's residence near The Hague before her move to Münster.

⁶ This engraving roughly corresponds to Mnesarchus's sculpture which triggers the discussion in *Simon*.

Millotti has three or four pieces which are curious for their subject matter and with which he will not part. Among others, an Erichthonius⁷ fighting a griffin which is truly beautiful, but which he loves too much himself [to part with]. Millotti afforded me the opportunity to look back at our little collection for the first time since Münster.⁸ It has gained some reputation in Italy and so too has your servant⁹, for there are gemstones which are sold there on the basis I've approved them, even though I've never seen them in my life. What I just said about the style of the Prometheus is false. It belongs to a later century and, when you see the stone which is the colour of the Homer¹⁰, you'll see the most noble and exact design that I've ever seen in a Greek work. This will surprise you, but it must be remembered that it's due to the onyx's colour, as in the Homer, and that the stone has been modified by the artist to please on its own account more than by its reproduction. If Winckelmann doesn't speak of this composition of Prometheus in that great work you possess.¹¹ I'm sure that it was absolutely unknown until now.¹²

[...]

★

The Hague, Tuesday 11th April 1786

My very dear Diotima, [...] ¹³

⁷ Erichthonius was a mythical Athenian King, fathered by Hephaestus and adopted and protected by Athena.

⁸ Either since Gallitzin's move to Münster in August 1779 or since Hemsterhuis and Gallitzin both visited Münster in May 1779.

⁹ Hemsterhuis.

¹⁰ I.e., an onyx engraved with Homer's portrait familiar to both Hemsterhuis and Gallitzin.

¹¹ Presumably J. J. Winckelmann's 1764 *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, although it could also be a reference to the 1767-8 *Monumenti antichi inedita*.

¹² Scenes depicting Prometheus creating the first man had become relatively popular in the second half of the eighteenth century, as testified by the statue of Pietro Stagi and the painting by F. A. Maulbertsch. As early as 1589, Hendrik Glotzius had composed *Prometheus forms man and animates him with fire from heaven*. An antique ringstone with an engraving of Prometheus creating the first man now sits in the Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen: it is similar insofar as the man is represented as a skeleton, but quite different in that Prometheus holds a chisel, rather than touching the man's head.

¹³ The translation to the opening paragraph of this letter is by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler and is taken from the forthcoming volume 3 to the *Edinburgh Edition of the Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*. The section, 'Further Reflections on Spinoza and the Spinoza Controversy', in that volume provides much of the background to the translation below.

I shall be delighted to receive polemical works concerning Lessing.¹⁴ I fear that this affair will cause pain and even harm to our dear Jacobi, [who is] subject to a very overwhelming hypochondria. If, after having read these pieces, I found that I could be of use to him in this matter, I would doubtless do something, but I will certainly do nothing without your advice. [...]

Goodbye, my very dear Diotima, my friend, may God bless you along with your dear children and your Great Friend¹⁵.

Σωκράτης

[P.S.] I don't dare reread my letter, fearing to see there only gibberish. Six pages on such material is certainly too little. Tell me, I beg you once and for all, who is the real author of the Prometheus Ode?¹⁶ Whoever it is, I will always admire him, not for the fundamentals of his piece of course, but for the inconceivable affinity there is between Euripides's turn of thought and that of this author.

★

The Hague, Tuesday 4th July 1786

My very dear Diotima, my friend, the post just arrived without bringing any of your news, although on Friday I did receive Jacobi's book, read it avidly straightaway and have since reread his dissertation on Spinozism anew.¹⁷ This is all I've seen concerning the controversy. All I can conclude from it is 1° that our dear Jacobi is not guilty in any respect and that he has done only what any man would have or could have in his place; 2° that the description our excellent Blankenburg gave me of Mendelssohn is of the most exact

¹⁴ On 30th March (B III.90), Gallitzin had relayed to Hemsterhuis some of the scandal caused in Germany by the publication of Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe* (which Hemsterhuis had already studied in December 1785). She suggested sending him the more recent polemics, Mendelssohn's *An die Freunde Lessings* and Jacobi's response (*Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen*) which both appeared in early 1786. On 7th April, Gallitzin adds, 'Jacobi has been charged with sending you everything which concerns the essentials of his literary quarrel and we will speak of it when you've read it all.' (B III.116)

¹⁵ Franz von Fürstenberg.

¹⁶ Goethe's poem is printed anonymously in Jacobi's *Spinoza-Briefe*.

¹⁷ The book Hemsterhuis has just received is *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen betreffend die Briefe über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1786) and 'the dissertation on Spinozism' is, of course, *Über Die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (1785).

truth;¹⁸ 3° that, between ourselves, it seems like a little bit of prudishness or vanity in the Lady-confidante¹⁹ was the cause of all this commotion, for, on the one hand, the matter does not appear to me as important as she seems to have believed, and, on the other, she ought to have been familiar enough with Mendelssohn to know that one shouldn't throw off-putting ideas straight into such minds without first preparing them. But ultimately, my dear Diotima, you will have seen and read more in this affair than me, [and so] you are in an infinitely better position to judge it, and I will be charmed to receive your insights on the above, although I even more eagerly implore [you to send] them on the [below] reflections on the subject of the poem which has for its title, *Prometheus*, and which I found to be, as you said, utterly beautiful.

1° If this poem had appeared in Jacobi's first book without Prometheus's name and as the scrap of some dramatic work, no one would have judged the author to be an atheist; no one would have fallen into Plutarch's error²⁰ of attributing the extensive opinions of the magnificent character of Sisyphus to the author of the tragedy (who he takes to be Euripides, but who is probably Critias.²¹ One day, I'll attempt to translate what remains to us of this beautiful speech, which contains the most seriously clever things the Ancients said against all divinity.)

2° It is only in our friend's more recent work that this poem, this scrap of some dramatic piece, is presented [explicitly] as a monologue by Prometheus²²—and this is absolutely absurd and pours ridicule on the poet whoever he is. If Sisyphus or Salmoneus²³, his brother—both well-known villains—had used such language, it would have been very natural. But Prometheus was Jupiter's first cousin. Both of them had Uranus as their

¹⁸ Christian Friedrich von Blankenburg (1744-96), the translator of the unauthorised 1782 German translation of Hemsterhuis's works. This description of Mendelssohn is not to be found in any of the extant letters. Hemsterhuis had himself corresponded with Mendelssohn in the early 1780s.

¹⁹ Presumably a rather uncharitable reference to Elise Reimarus, who had acted as intermediary between Jacobi and Mendelssohn at the very start of the controversy in 1783.

²⁰ Hemsterhuis is here referring to the fifth-century 'Sisyphus fragment' that was preserved in Sextus Empiricus' *Against the Physicians* (1.54) and which concludes, 'Thus first did some man, as I deem, persuade / Men to suppose the race of Gods exists.' It is usually ascribed to Critias, (460 – 403 BC) but some modern scholars still claim Euripides's authorship. It is not clear what passage in Plutarch Hemsterhuis is referring to—see, perhaps, *De superstitione* 171c.

²¹ See previous note.

²² Despite what Hemsterhuis suggests in the previous paragraph, neither Goethe's poem itself nor the initial *Spinoza-Briefe* mention Prometheus by name. Jacobi only does so for the first time at the opening to *Wider Mendelssohns Beschuldigungen* ([Leipzig: Goeve, 1786], 3).

²³ Mythical king and founder of Salmone; associated with 'wickedness' by Hesiod, Plutarch, Pindar, etc. Both Sisyphus and Salmoneus were sons of King Aeolus of Thessaly.

grandfather, and not only was Iapetus (father of Prometheus) brother of Saturn (father of Jupiter), but Saturn was younger than Iapetus and, in fact, the youngest of Uranus's six children.²⁴ Therefore, by right of birth, Prometheus had the advantage over Jupiter. Hence, in Aeschylus²⁵ and elsewhere he speaks very naturally of Jupiter as an usurper and a tyrant, but it would be the most ridiculous extravagance to make him say, my first cousin Jupiter or Zeus does not exist and is only a being of reason, even though, on Jupiter's orders, he is currently being crucified on the Caucasus [out of concern] for the wellbeing of men, and so much so that even the Church Fathers believed him to be the prototype of Jesus Christ.²⁶

If the author of the poem in question had first of all attributed it to Sisyphus, Lycaon²⁷, Salmones, etc., the whole scandal would have been avoided, and this beautiful poem could have formed a very beautiful part of some dramatic piece. Beautiful geniuses do not sense—or do so too late—the utility of knowing the theology of the ancients, and I note it is one of the attributes of your wisdom to have taught this science to Mimi and Mitri precisely at the age one ought to²⁸—a science which, within the empire of Beauty alone, is almost the most important of all, without even taking into account the light it throws on history and on the historical branch of philosophy. It forms an excellent study for children. It amuses, it ornaments and enriches the imagination. It exercises moral sensibility and leaves no trace that could do harm in the future.

I'm annoyed that our dear Jacobi failed to hit his mark, namely, to provoke discussion of the Spinozism of our day among minds made for [such discussion], for it seems to me that the nice way in which Mendelssohn and his like have turned the matter means that Jacobi must now leave them alone to speak at their ease.²⁹ [...]

Goodbye my very dear Diotima, my friend, may God bless you along with your dear children and our Great Friend.

Σωκράτης

²⁴ This is how Hesiod presents Prometheus's genealogy in the *Theogony*.

²⁵ In Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, where, e.g., Prometheus dubs Zeus, 'the tyrant of the gods' (l. 224).

²⁶ Tertullian occasionally speaks of God as 'the true Prometheus' (e.g., *Apology* 18), but it is in fact Lucian (one of Hemsterhuis's favourite writers) who develops the comparison between Christ and Prometheus most fully, but in a satirical vein, in his *Prometheus*. In later years, Hemsterhuis admits to having read very little of the Church Fathers first-hand (*B* 10.71).

²⁷ Mythical king of Arcadia who tested Zeus by serving him the flesh of his own son, according to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

²⁸ By the date of this letter both of Gallitzin's children were in their mid-teens.

²⁹ This is seemingly a reference to the repercussions of Mendelssohn's death in January 1786.

Symphilosophie

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

Lettre sur les désirs

(1770)

François Hemsterhuis

Présentation et transcription de Laure Cahen-Maurel*

Ce n'est pas une traduction que nous présentons ici mais la transcription du texte original de la *Lettre sur les désirs* de Hemsterhuis, tel qu'il apparaît dans la première édition de 1770, parue à Paris sans indication d'éditeur. Ce penseur hollandais rédigeait ses écrits philosophiques en langue française. Hemsterhuis ne savait pas l'allemand. C'est cependant en Allemagne, contre toute attente, que la pensée du « Platon batave » allait avoir l'impact le plus considérable, et ce pour une bonne part grâce à la traduction par Johann Gottfried Herder du texte qui suit. Comme le rappelle la spécialiste Claudia Melica, son tirage initial était pourtant limité à huit exemplaires, destinés uniquement aux plus proches amis de Hemsterhuis¹. Mais ces exemplaires ont circulé de mains en mains. Herder a eu l'un d'entre eux entre les mains, dès 1770, à l'occasion d'un séjour à Leiden et Amsterdam. Il l'a retenu suffisamment longtemps pour pouvoir, de retour en Allemagne, entreprendre de traduire lui-même la Lettre en allemand. Onze ans plus tard, en 1781, en raison des atermoiements de l'éditeur Hartknoch, qui devait faire paraître la première édition allemande d'un ensemble d'écrits philosophiques de Hemsterhuis², Herder finit par publier séparément sa traduction dans le *Teuscher Merkur* de Wieland, sous le titre *Brief über das Verlangen*. Sans la *Lettre*

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¹ Voir Claudia Melica, « Longing for Unity: Hemsterhuis and Hegel », *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, vol. 55, 2007, p. 145.

² L'édition a paru l'année d'après. Voir F. Hemsterhuis, *Vermischte philosophische Schriften*, Übersetzung ins Deutsche von C.F.v. Blankenburg, 2 vol., Leipzig, Hartknoch, 1782.

sur la sculpture de 1769, ni la *Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* de 1772, avec lesquelles celle de 1770 formait, selon Herder, un triptyque, mais assorti d'un commentaire important, publié après coup sous forme d'appendice et intitulé *Liebe und Selbstheit* (« Amour et Soi »)³. L'édition originale de la traduction herdérienne de la *Lettre sur les désirs* et de son essai peut aujourd'hui être consultée en accès libre sur le site de l'Université de Bielefeld⁴.

Herder (1744-1803) était de ces penseurs ayant cherché, dans la période des Lumières, à remettre au goût du jour les grandes questions traditionnelles de la métaphysique antique à l'appui des systèmes philosophiques du XVII^e siècle. La philosophie de Spinoza, principalement, mais aussi celle de Leibniz. Ce qu'il trouve en 1770 chez son contemporain Hemsterhuis, en particulier dans la *Lettre sur les désirs*, c'est un éclairage encore plus singulièrement prégnant à ses yeux d'une de ces questions : le thème platonicien de l'amour compris comme un besoin d'unité et de totalité, dans un sens à la fois éthique et métaphysique. En effet, dans les pages qui suivent, Hemsterhuis renouvelle l'approche de ce motif central du *Banquet* et du *Phèdre* en comparant le désir, aspiration profonde de l'être humain vers un objet qui réponde à son attente et, partant, principe d'unification entre des éléments séparés, à la force d'attraction de la matière. Il mêle ainsi à l'éthique et à la métaphysique les théories de la physique newtonienne sur l'attraction et la répulsion.

La postérité de la *Lettre sur les désirs* de Hemsterhuis est allée au-delà de sa réception herdérienne : Hölderlin, mais aussi les premiers romantiques allemands ou encore Hegel en ont fait une appropriation fructueuse pour dépasser, sur la question de la religion, la perspective de la philosophie transcendantale, kantienne et fichtéenne, les concepts de réunification et d'amour se substituant à l'idéal de vertu et au primat de la raison pratique.

³ Le titre complet est *Liebe und Selbstheit. Ein Nachtrag zum Briefe des Hr. Hemsterhuis über das Verlangen*.

⁴ Aux adresses suivantes : http://ds.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/1951387_036/107/ ; et http://ds.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/viewer/image/1951387_036/225/LOG_0026/

Lettre sur les desirs, à M. T. D. S.
À Paris, MDCCLXX.

----- *Propria rate pellimus undas.*
Manilius.

AVERTISSEMENT

DE
L'ÉDITEUR.

Quelques Personnes ayant fait assez d'accueil à une petite brochure qui a paru depuis peu sous le titre de *Lettre sur la Sculpture*, on en donne ici la suite d'après une copie de la main de l'Auteur, sous le titre de *Lettre sur les Desirs*.

On a suivi l'original avec la dernière exactitude, tant pour les desseins des vignettes que pour l'orthographe ; & assurément l'Auteur n'aura pas à se plaindre à cet égard.

Au reste on se flatte que cette pièce, trop courte pour ennuyer, amusera par un ton Philosophique assez conforme au goût du Siècle.

MONSIEUR,

Dans la Lettre que j'eus l'honneur de vous adresser sur la Sculpture il y a quelque temps, je vous avois promis de vous écrire touchant une propriété de l'Ame, qui, après une longue contemplation d'un objet désiré, fait naître le dégoût.

Je m'acquitte de ma promesse [6] d'autant plus volontiers, que celle-ci servira en quelque façon de suite & d'éclaircissement à ma précédente.

La propriété dont il s'agit ici est fort analogue à la force attractive que nous observons constamment dans ce que nous appellons matière. Mais avant que de passer à la recherche de cette propriété, il faut que je vous avoue ma parfaite ignorance de ce que c'est que matière, en ajoutant, qu'il ne me paroît guère probable qu'elle soit ce que nos Physiciens rigides nous font accroire, puisque les idées des attributs que nous lui supposons, ne résultent que du rapport qui se [7] trouve entre quelques effets & nos organes.

Je crois vous avoir prouvé dans ma précédente, que l'Ame cherche toujours le plus grand nombre d'idées possible dans le plus petit espace de temps possible, & que ce qui l'empêche de se contenter à cet égard, réside

dans la nécessité où elle se trouve de se servir d'organes & de moyens, & d'agir par succession de temps & de parties.

Si l'Ame pouvoit être affectée par un objet sans le moyen des organes, le temps qu'il lui faudroit pour s'en faire l'idée seroit réduit exactement à rien.

Si l'objet étoit tel, que l'Ame |8| pût être affectée par toute la totalité de l'essence de cet objet, le nombre des idées deviendroit absolument infini; & ces deux cas supposés ensemble, la totalité ou la somme de ces idées représenteroit sans moyen, & sans aucune succession de temps ou de parties, toute la totalité de l'objet : ou plutôt cet objet seroit uni de la façon la plus intime & la plus parfaite à l'essence de l'Ame ; & c'est alors qu'on pourroit dire, que l'Ame jouit de la façon la plus parfaite de cet objet.

Si je suppose l'Ame & l'objet deux substances homogenes, la jouissance pourra être réciproque & parfaite, c'est-à-dire que les |9| deux substances seront tellement une seule substance, que toute idée de dualité sera détruite : & en vérité si on suppose deux substances homogenes ou hétérogenes douées de certains attributs, tous les rapports de ces deux substances ensemble ne me donnent pas encore l'idée qu'on attache au mot de jouir ; & pour que l'on conçoive que ces deux substances jouissent réciproquement l'une de l'autre, il faut les supposer unies & ne faisant qu'un être ensemble.

Ainsi le but absolu de l'Ame, lorsqu'elle desire, est l'union la plus intime & la plus parfaite de son essence avec celle de l'objet de- |10| siré. Mais comme dans l'état actuel où l'Ame se trouve, il lui est presque impossible de tendre vers cette union si ce n'est par le moyen des organes, il lui est également impossible de parvenir à la jouissance parfaite de quoi que ce puisse être.

Pour les objets que l'Ame peut désirer, ils sont ou homogenes ou hétérogenes à son essence ; & la vivacité des desirs, ou plutôt le degré de la force attractive, se mesurera constamment par le degré d'homogénéité de la chose désirée ; & ce degré d'homogénéité consiste dans le degré de possibilité de la parfaite union.

Par exemple, on aimera moins |11| une belle statue que son Ami, son Ami que sa Maîtresse, & sa Maîtresse que l'Être suprême. C'est par-là que la Religion fait de plus grands enthousiastes que l'Amour, l'Amour que l'Amitié, & l'Amitié que ce desir pour des choses purement matérielles.

Lorsque je contemple une belle chose quelconque, une belle statue, je ne cherche en vérité que d'unir mon être, mon essence, à cet être si hétérogene ; mais après bien des contemplations je me dégoûte de la statue, & ce dégoût naît uniquement de la réflexion tacite que je fais sur l'impossibilité de l'union parfaite.

|12| Cette expérience, qui est très vraie, & qui sera peut-être encore éclaircie dans la suite, n'est à la vérité bien intelligible qu'aux seules ames qui, heureusement ou malheureusement, joignent le tact le plus fin & le plus exquis, à cette énorme élasticité interne qui les fait aimer & desirer avec fureur, & sentir avec excès : c'est-à-dire à ces Ames qui sont ou modifiées ou placées de telle façon, que leur force attractive trouve le moins d'obstacles dans sa tendance vers leur but.

Dans l'Amitié l'impossibilité de l'union paroît moins grande ; & dans l'Amour, la Nature nous trompe un instant ; mais le dégoût qui suit |13| montre avec évidence l'imperfection de l'union si complète en apparence*.

Dans l'Amour de Dieu, c'est-à-dire dans la contemplation mentale du Grand Etre, il ne sauroit y naître du dégoût, puisque nous ne nous apercevons pas d'une impossibilité absolue de l'union désirée. L'homogénéité paroît parfaite.

Nous connoissons son existence ou par le sentiment interne qu'il a mis dans notre Ame, ou très assurément par des démonstrations exactes & à toute épreuve. Pour ses attributs c'est notre raison & souvent notre imagination, qui les |14| créent[†] : mais en considérant cet Etre immense en Philosophe, c'est un Etre simple & infini.

Voyons encore, s'il vous plait, les purs effets de la Nature dans les grandes passions. Ce n'est pas sans doute une invention des hommes : ce n'est pas de l'éducation que nous avons appris à embrasser nos Parens & nos Amis, à les serrer dans nos bras avec une force proportionnée à notre amour. Voyez cette tendre Mere avec son enfant sur les ge- |15| noux : voyez comme elle le presse contre son sein, comme elle l'inonde de baisers[‡]. Examinez bien le mécanisme de ce baiser si admirablement dépeint par Lucrece, & vous verrez que l'Ame cherche tous les moyens de s'unir essentiellement avec l'objet qu'elle desire.

Je crois qu'il est assez évident par ce que je viens de dire, que le desir de l'Ame est une tendance vers l'union parfaite & intime avec l'essence de l'objet désiré ; & ensuite, que l'Ame tend proprement vers l'union parfaite & intime avec tout |16| ce qui est hors d'elle[§] : c'est-à-dire que sa qualité attractive est universelle** , comme elle l'est dans chaque partie de ce que nous

* *Omne animal triste post coitum.*

† *Ωσπερ δὲ καὶ ταῖς εἰδιῇ ἑαυτοῖς ἀφομοιοῦσιν οἱ ἀνθρώποι, ἔξω καὶ τὰς βίβας τῶν θεῶν.* L'homme attribue aux dieux ses mœurs & ses coutumes, comme il leur attribue sa figure. *Aristot. Polit.*

‡ *Et tenet adfuctis humectans oscula labris.*

§ *Τῶ ὄλε ἐν τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ καὶ διώξει, Ἐξωσ ὄνομα.* La concupisience & la poursuite du tout s'appelle Amour, dit Aristophane dans le Symposium de Platon.

** *Inest ingenio humano motus quidam arcanus, & tacita inclinatio in amorem alio rum qui fi non infumatur in unum vel paucos, naturaliter se dissundit in plures.* Baco Verulam.

appellons matiere, & que par conséquent elle desire toujours ; car lorsqu'on aura mis un obstacle invincible à sa tendance vers son but le plus désiré, elle tendra tout de sui- |17| te vers un objet moins désiré. Dénys se plaisoit encore à Corinthe.

Nous avons vu en général que l'Ame tend à l'union avec tout ce qui est hors d'elle, & qu'elle desire toujours l'objet avec lequel cette union est le moins impossible.

Maintenant il s'agiroit d'une recherche extrêmement curieuse, savoir de celle des moyens par lesquels l'Ame fait agir cette tendance pour tâcher d'arriver au but qu'elle se propose.

L'Ame, qui est éternelle par son essence, qui répugne à tout rapport avec ce que nous appellons succession & durée^{††}, habite un |18| corps qui paroît fort hétérogene à la nature de l'Ame ; sa liaison avec ce corps est très imparfaite : car dans le temps que vous lisiez ces lignes, & avant que je vous en avertisse, vous n'aviez aucune perception, aucune idée quelconque de vos jambes, de vos bras, ou d'autres parties de votre corps ; & la non-existence de toutes ces parties, n'auroit fait pour le moment aucun changement quelconque au *Vous* qui pense. Après mon avertissement votre Ame ira faire la revue de vos membres, & si vous y prenez bien garde, assez |19| en désordre, ne sachant bien où elle ira la premiere.

La connoissance que l'Ame a de son corps n'est pas supérieure à celle qu'elle a de tous les autres corps qui l'environnent ; car elle n'en a aucune idée que par l'action extérieure du corps sur ses propres organes. Pour les sensations intérieures, elles tiennent à la nature de l'Ame, & nullement à la nature du corps : ce ne sont tout au plus que les modifications du corps qui causent ces sensations.

Le corps est presque aussi étranger à l'Ame que tout autre corps, en tant qu'il exécute la volonté de l'Ame ; car en prenant un bâton à |20| la main, l'effet de la velléité de l'Ame se manifeste aussi bien au bout du bâton qu'au bout des doigts.

En tant que le corps est le véhicule de la matiere moyenne, qui transmet quelque action d'un objet extérieur à l'Ame, pour qu'elle se forme l'idée de l'objet, le corps est un instrument passif dont l'Ame doit se servir.

Voilà le tableau du composé de l'homme. Mais ce qu'il y a de plus admirable dans ce composé, c'est d'un côté la faculté de produire, par le moyen des deux sexes, un composé qui lui ressemble ; & de l'autre, celle de pouvoir régler cette force, non en l'anéantissant, ou en diminuant son

^{††} Cette assertion est une suite nécessaire de la propriété démontrée dans la *Lettre sur la Sculpture* ; mais elle se démontre d'une façon directe, comme je le ferai voir ailleurs.

intensité (ce |21| qui seroit impossible), mais en rendant son action plus difficile par des obstacles, & en la détournant par-là d'un objet vers un autre objet.

Cette divine faculté est la base de toute morale ; & si pour un moment on la compare à ce que nous appellons inertie dans la matiere, on soupçonneroit presque que l'idée que nous nous faisons communément de cette inertie^{##}, dont l'énergie |22| pourtant doit contrebalancer toute la force attractive de l'Univers sensible, est bien peu juste.

Mais retournons aux moyens dont l'Ame peut se servir pour approcher de cette union désirée. Il y en a deux sur-tout qui méritent à plusieurs égards d'être approfondis : l'un physique, l'autre intellectuel.

Il n'y a personne parmi ceux qui se mêlent de réfléchir & de penser, qui ne soit convaincu par sa propre expérience de la correspondance singuliere qu'il y a entre les parties de la génération & nos idées ; combien de certaines idées causent de changement dans ces parties, & combien promptement un change- |23| ment contraire dans ces parties fait évanouir ces idées.

Je ne conclurai rien de cette singuliere défaillance, qui fixe le moment de l'union du mâle & de la femelle. Je dirai seulement que de tous les moyens physiques dont l'Ame se sert dans sa tendance vers une union d'essence, c'est celui-là qui non-seulement la mene beaucoup plus loin que tout autre qu'elle voudroit tenter, mais encore (ce qui est bien remarquable) c'est celui qui se manifeste le plus dans tous ses desirs. J'en appelle à ces jeunes & vigoureux fanatiques, dont les passions en Religion, en Amour, en Amitié, ou dans ce desir pour |24| des choses purement matérielles, sont extrêmes ; & je gage que tous, si jamais ils ont réfléchi dans leurs momens de ferveur, quelle qu'ait été l'espece de leurs desirs, ils s'en sont ressentis plus ou moins dans ces parties où Platon déjà avoit placé le siege de la concupiscence.

Pour vous prouver la vérité de cette observation, considérez, je vous prie, les fols abus de toute espece que la corruption des mœurs a fait en tout siecle de ce moyen, auquel l'Être suprême peut paroître avoir confié la suite de la création.

Je parle non-seulement de la pédérastie, & de ces monstrueux mélanges d'hommes & d'animaux qui |25| se font dans ces climats dont le physique excite le plus ce moyen ; mais aussi de ces étranges fureurs d'une volupté

^{##} Cette inertie fait plus que contrebalancer les forces attractives de l'Univers sensible : car c'est le surplus de sa force par-dessus celle de cette attraction qui constitue le principe génératif de l'Univers, c'est le surplus de la force de la faculté directrice dans l'Ame par-dessus celle de sa force attractive, qui constitue les Etres moraux, la Morale, & la Vertu.

effrénée sur le marbre & le bronze, comme Pline & d'autres nous les rapportent^{§§}.

Je ne disconviens pas de la brutale extravagance de ces abus ; mais du moins est-il évident, que ces abus naîtroient naturellement de cette force attractive universelle, si l'Ame n'avoit en même |26| temps la faculté de régler cette force, ou si par corruption ou imbecillité elle en abandonnoit les rênes.

Pour le second moyen, qui est intellectuel, suivons la même méthode, & tâchons de le découvrir dans les expériences les plus communes. Lorsqu'on entre dans un cercle de plusieurs personnes également inconnues, ordinairement il y en a une à laquelle on s'adresse, à côté de laquelle on se met, & avec laquelle on lie la conversation préférablement à toutes les autres. La raison du choix qu'on fait de cette personne, est dans le principe du plus grand nombre d'idées dans le plus petit espace de temps ; & cel- |27| le de la liaison, dans le principe de la force attractive. Nous nous entretiendrons avec cette personne sur toutes sortes de sujets. Nous tâcherons de la considérer d'autant de côtés qu'il nous sera possible ; & prévenus déjà par le premier principe, que sa figure, le son de sa voix, son maintien a fait agir, nous lui parlerons de quelques affaires qui nous regardent, ou sur la façon dont nous pensons en particulier sur des choses connues. Si cette personne pense de même, & plus encore si elle fortifie notre façon de penser par de nouvelles raisons, l'homogénéité se manifeste. Si elle pense différemment, nous |28| tâchons ou de penser comme elle, ou de la faire penser comme nous. Ensuite nous lui parlons de nos passions, de nos desirs, enfin de notre situation morale. Elle nous aide ; elle nous console ; elle nous juge : & comme très assurément elle se trouve dans une situation différente de la nôtre, elle nous donne des vues nouvelles sur les choses qui nous regardent le plus. Nous suivons ces vues, & nous nous en trouvons bien.

Voilà le cours ordinaire d'une liaison qui se change en Amitié.

Ajoûtez à ceci l'empressement d'une personne qui travaille à perfectionner son homogénéité avec son chien ou avec quelque autre animal favori ; & voyez par quelles caresses elle lui paie un mot bien compris, ou l'acquisition de quelque idée en commun avec lui.

Il est évident par ce que je viens de dire, que le second moyen de tâcher à parvenir à une union d'essence, consiste à rendre l'objet désiré plus homogène, & à le rendre sensible pour nous d'un plus grand nombre de côtés : c'est-à-dire à augmenter la possibilité de l'union désirée.

^{§§} Ἐπεὶ νὰ ἀγαλμάτων καλῶν ἀκέτα πολλές ἐρασαὶ γενέσθαι, μὴ μόνον τῷ δη μιεεε τὴν τέχνην μὴ βλέποντας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ περὶ αὐτὰ πάθει τὴν ἔμψυχο ἡδονὴν τῷ ἔργῳ προστιθέντας, *Julian. Jamblichos Philos.*

Il est encore évident, que plus ces Amans ou ces Amis seront parfaits, leurs connoissances éten- |30| dues, leurs mœurs épurées, leurs Ames fortes & élevées ; plus cette attraction sera vive, & plus ils parviendront à se perfectionner mutuellement par un mutuel intérêt.

Voilà le précis du tableau que Socrate donne de l'Amour dans le Banquet de Xénophon. La sainteté de Socrate le met avec les siens à l'abri des blasphêmes de quelques Poètes impurs. Mais il ne sera pas hors de propos d'éclaircir encore en peu de mots les idées que nous nous formons de l'Amour ou de l'Amitié chez les Grecs.

L'Amour & l'Amitié avoient à peu près la même signification chez |31| eux que chez nous ; mais leur tact ou leur sensibilité extrême donnoit à toutes leurs passions & à tous leurs desirs une intensité que nous ne saurions concevoir, & par conséquent à leurs vertus & à leurs vices un éclat qui nous éblouit.

Cette sensibilité se manifeste d'abord dans leur langue, qui est sans comparaison la plus polie, la plus raffinée, & faite pour crayonner les traits les plus fins, & peindre les nuances les plus tendres de nos idées.

Il s'agit de développer maintenant les raisons de la grande différence qui se trouve entre leur tact ou sensibilité, & la nôtre. Il y en |32| a deux : l'une paroîtra en confrontant l'esprit de leur Législation avec celui de la nôtre : l'autre réside dans une chose qui nous est tout-à-fait particulière.

On peut considérer l'homme de deux façons différentes : comme individu, & comme membre d'une Société.

La Religion, qui résulte proprement du rapport*** de chaque |33| individu à l'Être suprême, & dont le but est le plus grand bien de chaque individu, n'avoit rien de précis chez les Grecs : le Polythéisme en faisoit un objet de cérémonie & de parade.

La Vertu civile, qui est la faculté qui dirige les actions de chaque individu vers le plus grand |34| bien de la Société, étoit donc la seule & unique chose qu'on avoit à perfectionner.

Les Législateurs, quoique convaincus pour la plupart de l'existence nécessaire d'un seul Dieu Créateur, voyoient bien pourtant qu'une Société†††

*** La connoissance de ce rapport dépend ou d'une révélation que Dieu daignera faire à chaque individu, ou de la perception ou de l'opinion de chaque individu, c'est-à-dire de la manière dont il sentira son rapport. Et comme il nous paroît presque im- |33| possible qu'il y ait deux individus exactement modifiés de la même façon, il doit nous paroître également impossible qu'il y ait deux rapports de deux individus à l'Être suprême exactement égaux, & par conséquent qu'il y ait un seul rapport général d'un certain nombre d'individus à Dieu composé des différents rapports de chacun de ces individus à Dieu.

††† On n'entend pas ici la Société qui dérive de la faculté sociale de l'homme, c'est-à-dire de cette force attractive qui le mene naturellement vers ce qui lui est le plus homogène en quelque façon ; mais on entend ici une Société particulière, un Etat politique, une modification particulière d'une partie de la Société générale.

n'étoit qu'une machine de création humaine, & par conséquent, qu'elle ne sauroit |35| avoir d'autre rapport à Dieu que celui d'un Automate ou d'une Pendule. Ils composèrent ces Automates pour le plus grand bien, en modifiant les facultés directrices de tous les individus à leur fantaisie. Ils laisserent cette espece de Religion à sa place, & s'en servirent quelquefois avec dextérité, croyant d'ailleurs qu'en hantant avec les Dieux le peuple y gagneroit au moins une certaine élévation. De-là s'ensuivit qu'on devoit laisser à chaque individu une certaine dose de liberté, pour diriger lui-même ses actions vers le plus grand bien de la Société ; & par conséquent il devint partie plus ou |36| moins respectable de l'Etat. Enfin son plus grand bien particulier coïncidoit en quelque façon avec celui de la Société ; & se voyant soi-même l'image de l'Etat, toutes ses facultés se multiplièrent : ce qui produisit nécessairement l'activité, l'industrie, l'ambition, &, ce qui plus est, ce vivifiant & enthousiaste Amour de la Patrie.

Chez nous qui jouissions d'une Religion révélée, l'individu devint sûr de son éternité. Son rapport à Dieu fut plus défini & plus connu ; mais son but changea de nature. Il vit bientôt que son plus grand bien ne sauroit se trouver dans un monde qui existe par succession ; & le |37| Législateur voyant par-là la Vertu civile un peu affoiblie, crut y remédier en la mêlant avec la Religion.

La Société, ou le Gouvernement qui la représente, qui n'a de droit que sur les actions de l'individu comme causes nécessaires de certains effets déterminés, entama ses intentions, ses méditations, & toutes les modifications de sa velléité, qui appartiennent uniquement à son rapport à Dieu ; & l'individu au contraire ne vit plus dans ses actions que les simples effets de sa velléité, sans considérer leur rapport avec la Société. La Religion & la Vertu ci- |38| vile, qui auroient dû rester séparées, s'affoiblirent réciproquement ; & la liberté interne de l'homme une fois entamée & flétrie, fait naître l'inactivité & l'abrutissement.

L'autre raison de cette grande sensibilité des Grecs en comparaison de la nôtre réside en ceci.

De notre ancienne Chevalerie naquit le point d'honneur, qui donna le jour à un espece de ceremonial d'homme à homme. Monstre singulier : composé bizarre du faste Asiatique & de l'esprit d'humilité Chrétienne, qui fit à la verité que les masses, qu'il couvroit comme une atmosphere, se choc- |39| quoient moins, mais aussi qu'on se vit à travers un nuage.

Une marque certaine que ces deux réflexions sont plus ou moins fondées, c'est que les hommes devenant plus éclairés, commencent déjà d'un côté à séparer la Religion de la Vertu civile, & de l'autre à jeter cette espece de politesse comme une arme défensive qui gêne par sa pesanteur.

Enfin cette sensibilité extrême des Grecs fit plus agir en eux & le principe attractif, & celui du plus grand nombre d'idées dans le plus petit espace de temps. Ils cherchèrent à la vérité, & se flatterent de trouver les plus grands |40| talents & les plus grandes vertus dans les corps les plus beaux ; ce qui souvent étoit vrai chez eux, & dut l'être par la nature de leur éducation. D'ailleurs cette idée étoit fort naturelle : car ils ne pouvoient penser à aucune de leurs Divinités, ni à aucun de leurs Héros, sans avoir l'idée d'une beauté parfaite dans son genre.

Il faut que l'utilité qui résultoit de la coagulation de ces Ames si fortes, si éclairées & si actives, & qui s'observoient de si près, fût bien considérable, puisqu'on voit chez ces Peuples des Législateurs même, qui souvent ont bien voulu courir le risque des abus du premier |41| moyen, pour ne pas perdre le fruit de l'autre.

Je crois, Monsieur, vous avoir prouvé, que l'Ame cherche naturellement d'unir son essence de la façon la plus parfaite & la plus intime avec l'essence de l'objet qu'elle desire, ou plutôt qu'elle veut être ce qu'elle desire : ce qui ressemble beaucoup à la nature de la faculté attractive que nous voyons incontestablement dans la matière.

En vérité tout ce qui est visible ou sensible pour nous, tend vers l'unité ou vers l'union. Pourtant tout est composé d'individus absolument isolés ; & nonobstant |42| cette belle apparence d'une chaîne d'êtres étroitement liés il paroît clair que chaque individu existe pour exister, & non pour l'existence d'un autre^{###}.

J'en conclus, que le Tout visible ou sensible se trouve actuellement dans un état forcé, puisque tendant éternellement à l'union, & restant toujours composé d'individus isolés, la nature du Tout se trouve éternellement dans une contradiction manifeste avec elle-même.

Si donc le Tout se trouve dans |43| un état forcé, il faudra en conclure nécessairement, qu'il y a un Agent qui le fait tendre vers l'union, ou qui par sa force & sa nature l'a divisé en individus.

Tout tend naturellement vers l'unité. C'est une force étrangère qui a décomposé l'unité totale en individus : & cette force est DIEU.

Il seroit de la plus extravagante démence de vouloir pénétrer jusqu'à l'Essence de cet ETRE impénétrable mais de la division du Tout en individus suit nécessairement une coexistence de parties ; & toute coexistence est nécessairement la source de rapports, & par |44| conséquent de loix inaltérables. Il seroit à souhaiter qu'on pût parler avec autant de vraisemblance, d'un côté sur l'inertie dans ce que nous appellons matière, & de

^{###} Voyez la première remarque à la fin de la Lettre.

FRANÇOIS HEMSTERHUIS

l'autre sur cette Liberté interne qui gouverne en quelque façon la faculté attractive de l'Ame.

J'ai l'honneur d'être

MONSIEUR

Votre

Très-humble & très-
obéissant Serviteur,

H. L. F.

La Haye,
le I de Nov.
1768.

[45]

REMARQUE.

Chaque individu existe pour exister, & non pour l'existence d'un autre. Ce qui est sensible même à la vue, en confrontant les productions de l'Art avec celles de la Nature. Ce qui est l'ouvrage de l'Art, n'est que le résultat des rapports désirés dans un assemblage de choses avec nos organes, ou avec notre façon d'apercevoir ou de sentir. Ce qui est l'ouvrage de la Nature, est le résultat de son *αὐταρκεία* [autarcie], c'est-à-dire de sa suffisance à exister, & par conséquent un total déterminé & parfait. Dans les ouvrages de l'Art, tous les rapports, excepté ceux qu'on a desi- [46] rés dans l'ouvrage, & qui ont été le but & l'origine de ces ouvrages, sont isolés, foibles, obscurs, imparfaits ou équivoques. Dans les ouvrages de la Nature, tous les rapports, sans exception, sont parfaits & déterminés, comme dérivant de la coexistence complète & déterminée de deux substances absolument finies & parfaites, & ayant en soi la force de pouvoir exister. Pygmalion, en quittant le temple de la Déesse, trouva chez lui de quoi se convaincre de cette vérité.

----- *Oraque tandem*

Ore suo non falsa premit. Dataque oscula Virgo Sensit: & erubuit: timidumque ad lumina lumen

Attollens, pariter cum cælo vidit amantem. Ovid, *Metamorph.*

|47|

REMARQUE GENERALE.

Voici tout le raisonnement en raccourci.

Tout objet visible, sonore, &c. dont l'Ame peut se faire une idée par le moyen des organes, est supposé un total composé de parties.

L'affection que l'Ame a d'un objet quelconque, est l'effet de l'action de l'objet sur l'Ame.

Cette action se décompose, comme toute action, en intensité & en durée.

L'intensité est mesurée par la quantité des parties de l'objet qui peuvent affecter l'Ame.

La durée est mesurée par le temps |48| que l'organe emploie à donner à l'Ame l'idée du total de l'objet, ou de la modification de cet objet, en tant qu'elle est analogue à la construction de l'organe.

Ainsi de deux objets dont les intensités seroient égales, l'action la plus forte sur l'Ame sera produite par l'objet dont l'organe pourra rendre l'idée à l'Ame dans le plus petit espace de temps ; & l'on trouve par l'expérience, que c'est précisément l'objet que l'Ame choisira des deux.

L'Ame choisiroit donc cet objet dont elle pourroit acquérir l'idée dans le plus petit espace de temps.

Par conséquent l'Ame desireroit le plus, parmi les objets visibles, un point |49| point lumineux presque imperceptible par sa quantité visible ; parmi les objets sonores, un son aigu presque imperceptible par sa durée, &c.

Mais l'Ame desire aussi les compositions, les ornemens, la quantité d'idées autant que possible.

Par conséquent l'Ame veut le plus grand nombre d'idées, dans le plus petit espace de temps possible.

Mais supposons que le temps que l'Ame doit employer à acquérir des idées, soit réduit à rien, il s'ensuit que l'Ame est également distante de toutes les parties de l'objet, ou également présente à toutes ces parties.

Supposons encore que la quantité des idées que l'Ame peut acquérir |50| d'un seul objet, devienne absolument infinie, il s'ensuit que dans l'infinité des idées de toutes les modifications, de tous les rapports internes & externes de l'objet, est comprise l'idée de propre existence, ou la conscience.

Or si d'un côté l'Ame est également présente à toutes les parties de l'objet, & que de l'autre l'Ame reçoit l'idée de propre existence ou la

conscience de l'objet ; il s'ensuit, que l'Ame seroit unie intimément à cet objet, ou plutôt seroit un seul tout avec cet objet sans aucune dualité.

Mais, dira-t-on, si un Être pensant, par-là même qu'il a des idées |51| claires de tous les rapports internes & externes de l'objet, & parmi ces idées celles de propre existence, est parfaitement & intimément lié avec l'objet, il s'ensuit que Dieu, qui a les idées des objets d'une façon aussi parfaitement intuitive qu'on la suppose ici, sera identifié avec les objets : ce qui est absurde.

En premier lieu je pourrais disputer sur le degré de force qu'on a le droit de donner aux argumens qui menent à l'absurde.

En second lieu je pourrais remarquer que l'absurdité de l'identification de Dieu avec l'objet, réside exactement dans l'impossibilité ou dans la contradiction manifeste qui |52| se trouve dans une identification de celui qui fait & qui conserve, avec ce qu'il fait & ce qu'il conserve. Mais supposons, du moins aussi long temps qu'il ne se développe d'autres rapports entre les parties de l'Univers que ceux que nous connoissons, supposons, dis-je, l'actualité de cette union parfaite, ou plutôt de cette indentification, impossible ou absurde ; il est clair pourtant que l'Ame dans ses desirs tend par sa nature vers cette union, ou desire une approximation continue. C'est l'hyperbole avec son asymptote : & voilà tout ce que j'ai voulu démontrer dans cette Recherche sur la nature des Desirs.

Dans celle que je me propose sur l'inertie & le principe génératif de l'Univers, il s'agira d'examiner de plus près & cette tendance, & l'approximation qui en résulte, & si la nature de cette approximation est infinie, ou si elle doit avoir un terme à l'union.

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On Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Desires* and *Letter on Man and his Relations*

Two Notices by Ludwig von Schrautenbach

Translated by Jacob van Sluis* and Daniel Whistler**

Introduction: Two Examples of the Early Hemsterhuis-Reception in Germany

In 1772, the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* published anonymous notices of two books by François Hemsterhuis. Rather than critical reviews, they were something like abstracts or paraphrases intended to familiarize the reader with their overall content without providing much in the way of evaluation or commentary. From a contemporary perspective, what is most intriguing about these notices is that they were for a long time attributed to Herder,¹ having been published in a journal to which both he and the young Goethe contributed that year. On this basis, Jörg-Ulrich Fechner has argued at length for their decisive influence on the early Goethe, particularly his *Von deutscher Baukunst*.² Even if research from the last sixty years has shown the Herder-ascription to be a misattribution and that they are, instead, by Ludwig Karl

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¹ Max Morris, *Goethes und Herders Anteil an dem Jahrgang 1772 der Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen* (1909), p. 128, 282; Leendert Brummel, *Frans Hemsterhuis, een Filosofenleven* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & zoon, 1925), pp. 285-6.

² Jörg-Ulrich Fechner, “‘du neufranzösischer philosophirender Kenner’: Hemsterhuis”, in Marcel Fresco *et al.* (eds), *Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790): Quellen, Philosophie und Rezeption* (Munich: LIT Verlag, 1995), pp. 507–25.

Freiherr von Schrautenbach (1724-1783),³ it remains true that the notices influenced figures who would go on to be significant readers of Hemsterhuis at the very moment his German reception-history was getting underway. That is, they are key documents for understanding the ‘first wave’ of Hemsterhuis’s German-reception, which includes more broadly Christian Garve, F. H. Jacobi, Sophie von La Roche and C. M. Wieland.

The *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* was a continuation of the *Franckfurter gelehrte Zeitung*, which had appeared from 1736. In 1772, it not only gained a new name and a new appearance (in octavo format, instead of quarto), but more importantly a new editor-in-chief: Johann Heinrich Merck (1741-1791). Merck gathered together a group of collaborators, including Herder and Goethe, and created such a controversial magazine that the project failed after just a year. The 1772 volume is, therefore, a singular monument to German intellectual life of the late eighteenth century.⁴

In his youth, Schrautenbach, a German nobleman, had befriended Count Ludwig Nikolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), founder of the pietistic community of the Moravian Brothers in Herrnhut (*Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine*). While their friendship cooled after Schrautenbach withdrew to his estate, he did note down his experiences of the Herrnhuters, published posthumously as the first critical biography of Zinzendorf. Merck and Schrautenbach knew each other from political circles in the Landgraviate of Hesse-Darmstadt; for example, they both travelled in the retinue of countess Caroline von Hesse-Darmstadt to the court of Empress Catherine II in Saint Petersburg from May to December 1773. They probably met Diderot there, who was also staying at court at that time,⁵ and may have discussed Hemsterhuis’s *Lettre sur l’homme* with him.

It is unknown how Merck and Schrautenbach became acquainted with Hemsterhuis’s writings: editions were rare and circulated only among Hemsterhuis’s close friends. Only after Hemsterhuis became friends with Amalie Gallitzin in 1775 did a line of dissemination into Germany open up. Nevertheless, at the time of his death, Schrautenbach’s personal library contained five texts by Hemsterhuis: four in print (*Lettre sur les désirs*, *Lettre sur l’homme et ses rapports*, *Sophyle ou la philosophie* twice, and *Alexis ou de la*

³ Hermann Bräuning-Oktavio, *Herausgeber und Mitarbeiter der Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen 1772* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966), pp. 73-5, 162-3. See the discussion in Heinz Moenkemeyer, ‘François Hemsterhuis: Admirers, Critics, Scholars’, *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 51.3 (1977): 503.

⁴ William F. Roertgen, *The Frankfurter Gelehrte Anzeigen, 1772-1790: An Analysis and Evaluation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964).

⁵ Adalbert Elschenbroich, ‘Merck, Johann Heinrich’, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 17 (1994), pp. 117-20.

divinité) and two in manuscript (*Addition à la Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports* and *Simon ou des facultés de l'âme*). This is in the context of a collection containing 832 titles (in about 1600 volumes), 110 of which can be classified as philosophy. After Plato, Hemsterhuis is the most represented author. And yet, Schrautenbach never otherwise published on philosophical topics.⁶

The most remarkable Hemsterhuis text in Schrautenbach's collection was the manuscript of *Simon* (written between 1779 and 1783). According to a record kept by Hemsterhuis himself, fourteen copies were sent to his friends (four to Gallitzin),⁷ but he nowhere mentions Schrautenbach in his correspondence. However, Hemsterhuis did know Merck personally, for Merck had met Hemsterhuis while visiting Petrus Camper twice in the Netherlands in 1784 and 1785⁸ and he had already gained possession of a handwritten manuscript of *Simon* in 1783, showing it to anyone who wanted it.⁹ Yet, this still does not solve the mystery of how Schrautenbach had access to Hemsterhuis's texts in 1772.

All that can be said with certainty is that Schrautenbach is effusive about Hemsterhuis's early publications. His verdict in the *Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen* is a positive one, despite his pietist leanings which might have been thought to stand in tension with Hemsterhuis's reservations about revealed religion in the *Letter on Man*.

⁶ Hermann Bräuning-Oktavio, 'Die Bibliothek des Freiherrn Ludwig Carl von Weitolshausen, genannt Schrautenbach, Herr zu Lindheim in der Wetterau', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel, Frankfurter Ausgabe*, 43 (1969), pp. 1285-1314. See Hermann Arthur Lier, 'Schrautenbach, Ludwig Karl Freiherr von', in: *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* 32 (1891), pp. 461-4.

⁷ Jacob van Sluis, *Kringen rondom François Hemsterhuis: Vrienden, verwanten en passanten* (Berlsum: Van Sluis, 2018), pp. 80-1. It is possible that the Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt, mentioned in this list, may have been the intermediary with Schrautenbach.

⁸ J.K. van der Korst, *Het rusteloze bestaan van dokter Petrus Camper (1722-1789)* (Houten: Nederlands Tijdschrift voor Geneeskunde / Bohn Stafleu van Loghum, 2008), p. 174, 210; Hemsterhuis, Letter 5.49 (25th June 1784).

⁹ Siegfried Sudhof (ed.), *Der Kreis zu Münster. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen Fürstenbergs, der Fürstin Gallitzin und ihrer Freunde* (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), I, p. 147.

On Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Desires* and *Letter on Man and his Relations*

Two Notices by Ludwig von Schrautenbach

***Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen*, no. XXXVIII, pp. 297-302 (12th May 1772).**

Letter on Desires to Mr. T[heodorus] d[e] S[meth],¹¹ Paris 1770. Duodecimo. 53 pp.

This writing is by the younger Mr. Hemsterhuis from The Hague,¹² whom our readers will at the very least be familiar with from the Leipzig *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*.¹³ In addition to the most profound knowledge of a man of state, he unites the most recent developments in astronomy and metaphysics with the warmest enthusiasm for the plastic arts, which he himself practises as a dilettante with genuine success.

He appeals to an experience from the *Letter on Sculpture* where he observed that, after long contemplation of the same object, the soul feels disgust and aversion within itself.¹⁴ This property becomes the very ground on which he constructs his system of the activities of the human soul. The soul always seeks to enjoy the greatest number of ideas in the shortest space of time, and what prevents it [from doing so] is the necessity of employing certain organs in order to pass through a succession of time and parts. If the soul could be affected by an object without [the need for] organs, the time it took to form an idea of it would be precisely nothing. If the object were so constituted that [the soul] could be affected by the entire totality of its essence, then the number of ideas would be absolutely infinite. Moreover, if these two cases occurred at the same time, the sum of these ideas—without media and without any succession of time and parts—would represent the

¹¹ A Dutch banker to whom both the *Letter on Sculpture* and the *Letter on Desires* are addressed.

¹² 'Younger' to distinguish him from his equally famous father, Tiberius Hemsterhuis.

¹³ A reference to a review of Hemsterhuis's *Letter on Sculpture*, anonymously published by Christian Garve in *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künsten*, XI / 2 (Leipzig: Dyckischen Buchhandlung, 1771), pp. 296-329.

¹⁴ The following paraphrases the whole argument of the *Letter on Desires* from the first to the last paragraph (*EE* 1.79-85), although it does not explicitly mention material from the appended 'General Remark' (*EE* 1.86-7) which is explicitly intended to forestall Spinozist interpretations of the work. The reference to the *Letter on Sculpture* here is to *EE* 1.67.

entire totality of the object: or this object would be united with the essence of the soul in the most intimate and perfect fashion. Then one could say that the soul enjoys this object in the most perfect way. The liveliness of the desire, or the degree of attractive force, is determined by the degree of homogeneity of the desired object [with the soul]; and this degree of homogeneity consists in the degree to which perfect union is possible. One will love a beautiful statue less than one's friend, one's friend less than one's lover, and one's lover less than the supreme being. It is for this reason religion forms greater enthusiasts than love, love greater [ones] than friendship, and friendship greater [ones] than the desire for merely material things. When I gaze at a beautiful statue, I seek nothing more than to unite my being with its essence; but after long contemplation, aversion arises within me, and this comes from no other source than the silent conclusion I have drawn over the impossibility of a perfect union. In friendship, the impossibility of union does not appear as great; and, in love, nature deceives us for a moment, yet the aversion which immediately follows clearly shows the impossibility of that union which, on the face of it, appeared so perfect to us. Among the means the soul employs to achieve this union, two in particular deserve consideration: the first is physical, the second intellectual. Everyone knows the special harmony that exists between our ideas and the reproductive parts of our body. Of all the physical means [the soul] uses to unite its being with the desired object, this is the strongest, manifest and intermixed everywhere. I call upon all enthusiasts in religion, love, friendship, and the arts, who have solely material things as their object, whether in the heat of their passion they have felt no alteration [in that place] where Plato long ago identified the seat of desire. Here belong all those debauches of impurity committed in all epochs on one's own sex [*Geschlechte*],¹⁵ on marble and bronze. These errors of imagination arose from nothing but this universal attraction, and they would have continued forever if the soul did not, at the same time, have the faculty to check this force; not that it annihilates it, or diminishes its intensity, but [this faculty] hampers its progress by way of obstacles, and leads it from an object onto another path. This divine faculty is the pillar of all morality. It can be compared to what, in matter, is called *vis inertiae*. In friendship everything works towards the production of this homogeneity: from the very first moment among a group of strangers when we choose one person in particular, the soul labours incessantly to discover more points of agreement [with this person], and love or friendship grows in proportion to this

¹⁵ Hemsterhuis gives the more specific example of 'pederasty' in the original text (*EE* 1.82). Of course, 'gender' is an equally possible translation here.

discovery. With what incessant effort do those who live alone work to [achieve] perfect homogeneity with their dog or other favourite animal: and with what caresses do they repay a well-understood word or a newly acquired common idea.

Among the Greeks, love and friendship had roughly the same meaning as they do for us; only their feeling and their extraordinary sensibility gave a strength to all their passions we cannot grasp, and [gave] a splendour to their virtues and vices which dazzles us. Religion, which really consists in nothing but the relation of each individual to the supreme being, and the end goal of which is the highest possible happiness of each individual, possessed nothing determinate [about it] among the Greeks: polytheism made from [this indeterminateness] an object of ceremony and parade. Civic virtue, or the faculty that directs the action of each individual to the highest good of society, was the only thing at which one had to work. Though for the most part convinced of the necessary existence of one creator and God, legislators saw that every form of society was a creature of human hands and that this particular form could have no other relation to God than any clock or machine. So, they assembled these machines according to the best possible design, and modified the governing powers of each individual as they pleased. [But] they left alone that kind of religion, even if occasionally making use of it skilfully, because they believed that, through association with the gods, the people would receive something sublime in their way of thinking. From this it followed that each individual was allowed a certain dose of freedom to determine its own actions for the highest good of society; and, consequently, [the individual] formed a more or less respectable part of the state itself. Since [the individual] regarded itself as the image of the state, its powers were doubled: and this necessarily gave rise to activity, industry, thirst for honour, and a patriotism that animates everything. For us, who possess a revelation, the individual was certain of its continued existence into eternity. Its relation to God became more determinate and better known; but its final purpose was different. It would soon see that its highest good was not to be found in a world of temporal succession; and, discovering that civic virtue was thereby slightly weakened, legislators sought the remedy in mingling [the state] with religion. The state, or the government which represents it, which has no right to the actions of the individual except insofar as they are necessary causes of certain definite effects, attacked [the individual's] intentions, thoughts, and every modification of his velleity,¹⁶ which really still belonged solely to [the

¹⁶ Schrautenbach uses *Velleität* to correspond to Hemsterhuis's *velleité*. For Hemsterhuis, the term signifies indeterminate willpower as it exists prior to being actualised in particular acts of will. It pertains, moreover, to the very essence of the subject.

individual's] relation to God. In contrast, the individual saw in his actions nothing more than the simple activity of his velleity, without considering its relations to the state. Religion and civic virtue, which should have remained separate, alternately weakened one another; and since man's inner freedom had now been oppressed and attacked, despondency and indolence naturally followed.

Everything we see and sense strives for union. However, everything is composed of individuals which exist absolutely for themselves; and, notwithstanding that beautiful semblance of a chain of closely united beings, it seems clear that each individual exists in order to exist, and not because of the existence of another. Since, therefore, the whole is in a forced state, it follows that there is an originator [*Urheber*] who allows it to strive toward union, or who by its power and nature has divided it into individuals. And I call this originator God.

We have not put our name to everything in this exceptional writing, the rarity of which (there do not exist more than 80 copies) will excuse this extended excerpt. The sequence of claims as they emerge from H[emsterhuis]'s mind, is always remarkable, even if it were to end up furnishing nothing more than new data on the genealogy of ideas for the psychologist.

***Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen*, no. XCI, pp. 721-726 (13th November 1772)**

Letter on Man and his Relations, Paris 1772. Octavo. 65 pp.¹⁷

We are pleased to be able to announce this more recent writing by the younger Mr. Hemsterhuis. It is a continuation of the main ideas of his system, only briefly indicated in the previous *Letter on Desires*, which are further developed in this larger work “on the progress of the sciences.”¹⁸ We apologise for the fact that we proceed so quickly and superficially over the most important parts of this book and so must refer our readers back to the book itself.

No perceptive being can receive a sensation of any substance other than by means of the ideas or images arising from the relation [*Verhältniß*] in which this being stands to such a substance, or which separates [the substance] from

¹⁷ Schrautenbach is not using the ‘official’ edition in duodecimo format published by Hemsterhuis himself, but a pirated edition in octavo, actually published by an unknown publisher in Liège. See Jacob van Sluis, ‘Introduction’, in: François Hemsterhuis, *Oeuvres philosophiques : édition critique* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 39-40.

¹⁸ A quotation from *EE* 1.88.

this being. Hemsterhuis calls this [relation] the organ or medium: that is, he understands by this not only the eye that sees, but also the light that reflects on the object. Thus, the perceptive being behaves in a passive manner, and the way man receives ideas is common to animals. But, when there is a being that thinks and draws conclusions, then it possesses signs that are not the objects themselves, but that agree with the objects, and these signs are in [the being's] power. A perceptive being has three ways of obtaining ideas, 1.) through the action of the objects that set the media or organs in motion; 2.) through the accidental movement that is communicated by organs; 3.) and through the movement that is communicated to the organs by signs. An idea generated in the first way, through the presence of the object itself, undoubtedly has the greatest clarity. The second [way] is far less clear and very often confused, and [thirdly] those ideas which the velleity brings about through signs are weaker, but without the slightest confusion. Experience teaches us to take these different degrees of clarity into account. When we dream that we are in broad daylight and then wake up to suddenly see the true day itself, we notice the difference between the idea presented by the true object and the one presented by an accidental movement of the organs. If we play chess with our eyes closed, we once more see the difference between the signs and the true object. The animal lacks the [third] way of bringing about its ideas. But since all its ideas are almost equally clear, it has equally strong passions, and thus — so to speak — a more generic character [*Nationalcharakter*] than man.

We will now pass over the proofs of the differences between the soul and the body, of matter, of its necessary beginning, of an eternal originator [*Urheber*] of [this beginning], etc. They appear in a very interesting way through their sequence and language, so that Mr. Hemsterhuis has been able to convey them as an interesting novelty. Because of its great importance, we need only add one idea: “[The soul] senses that it acts only by the idea of reaction. Without the reaction it would have no idea of its velleity.”¹⁹ One can see in advance how fruitful this principle must become for morality, and that man considered as an island, without society, is merely a mutilated being. In encountering the objections from page 17²⁰ onwards, we were particularly pleased that Mr. Hemsterhuis does not just deny eternity to animal souls, but that he also believes that any demand to prove our velleity is as absurd as [the demand] to prove our own existence. Moreover, he

¹⁹ A quotation from *EE* 1.96.

²⁰ Corresponding to *EE* 1.97

rescues [this velleity] (p. 20²¹) very shrewdly from the materialists, showing how different it is from the nature of the mere force of a coil-spring.

As long as the soul receives its ideas through media and organs, it will never penetrate into the true essence of things. In the gravity of the attractive force, man discerns the *vis inertiae*, a constant action and counteraction, and from this he concludes that there are more principles of action in the world as effects. H[emsterhuis] calls that which makes a thing what it is the *vis inertiae*; and what causes it to be in a certain place, or in a certain relation [*Verhältniß*] with other things, he calls the attractive force. Then he shows that, at bottom, these two forces work in the same way, that they are not opposed to each other, and that, if there were nothing in the world to oppose them, everything would soon be brought back to unity. Even the homogeneous and heterogeneous parts that compose all matter, and their reciprocal interaction, would not hinder this final unity without the universal assumption—as with the planets—of a *vis centrifuga*, opposed to the *vi attractionis*. Hemsterhuis does not reveal his thoughts on the propagation of souls, but on p. 26²² he cites a strange experience that deserves to be examined and further considered. Since man is therefore aware of this eternal strife between two opposed principles, he must draw the necessary conclusion that the world does not exist through itself, but through another.

Just as the eye and light give me ideas of visible things, so does the heart, and society or community with thinking beings—with active principles—give me ideas of active velleities, or show me the moral side of the world. But this medium differs from the others in that it shows me a side [of the universe] of which my soul, my I, is a part. Hence, my I itself becomes an object of contemplation; for this medium not only enables us, like the other ones, to sense the relation of things outside of us, but also the relation we have to these things—that is, the first idea of duty. Next, the author comes to signs for making oneself understood by others, and here, from p. 31²³ on, the most remarkable observations concerning gestures and their necessary effects [*Wirkungen*] are made, from which he draws the conclusion (p. 35²⁴) that man, by his very nature, must possess communicative signs or a determinate language; not [a language] whose words imitate what is signified by their tone, but whose words, as necessary results of the movement impressed on the voice-organ from the beginning, serve to express the idea. If man did not possess this moral medium, he would merely imitate effects [*Wirkungen*],

²¹ Corresponding to *EE* 1.98.

²² Corresponding to *EE* 1.102.

²³ Corresponding to *EE* 1.105.

²⁴ Corresponding to *EE* 1.108.

and [do] neither good nor evil. Good and evil are not opposed to each other; rather, the [current] modification of society and our actions with regard to it have placed us precisely in the middle between what we call good and evil. If one were to object that, in the case of duties and desires, this passive reception of ideas through a medium cannot occur, Hemsterhuis replies that this is precisely the case with pangs of conscience, where the I becomes an object of consideration. The [imperfect] irritability [*Reizbarkeit*] of the moral organ or its perfection thus determines the entire worth of men and their actions and duties. “The perfection of the moral organ differs in all individuals; and therefore any *two individuals* have in fact *different duties* to fulfil, not by way of relation to the artificial and mechanical laws of society, but by way of relation to natural laws and to the eternal order which derives from the coexistence of things. There are men whose moral organ is so sensitive, or whose conscience senses such distant relations, that, so to speak, they cannot be members of current society.”²⁵

Next follows the bright side of [Hemsterhuis’s] construction, and, from this viewpoint, one discovers the most wonderful views of religion, law, and language, which we leave for our readers to enjoy for themselves. It is enough for us to have accompanied [this philosophy] through its obscure courtyard and the temple’s wonderful colonnades. Here, too, the Christian religion loses nothing before the philosopher’s calm, unwavering gaze, but rises above all [other] competitors [*Gespielte*] which have covered the earth before and alongside it. One should read pp. 49-55.²⁶ Permit us to place one more passage before our readers—at the very least, its tone shows how much the author cares for the truth. “There is nothing in the world more respectable than theologians and philosophers, such as they still exist in our day. But, on the one hand, [there are] the so-called Orthodox, whose stiffness, stubbornness, stupidity, lack of intelligence and outrageous ambition lead them to claim that all men should think and understand like they do, and who do not reflect on the fact that, *if there were any proof against the Christian religion, the strongest, no doubt, would be that the word of God is in need of their interpretation.*”²⁷ And then [there are] the equally scabious clique of so-called philosophers who “have silenced their moral organ for a while [...] who want to convert all men so that none could make them glimpse an all-present God whom they dread etc.”²⁸

²⁵ A quotation from *EE* 1.111-12; Schrautenbach’s italics.

²⁶ Corresponding to *EE* 1.116-20.

²⁷ A quotation from *EE* 1.120; Schrautenbach’s italics.

²⁸ A quotation from *EE* 1.120.

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Anzeigen von Hemsterhuis'

Lettre sur les desirs und Lettre sur l'homme & ses Rapports

Ludwig von Schrautenbach

Transkription von Jacob van Sluis*

Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen, Nro. XXXVIII, S. 297-302.

Den 12. May 1772.

Paris.

Lettre sur les desirs à M. T. D. S. 1770. 12. 53 S.

Diese Schrift ist von dem jüngern Herrn Hemsterhuys im Haag, den unsre Leser wenigstens aus der Leipziger Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften kennen werden. Neben den tiefsten Kenntnissen des Staatsmanns, vereinigt er die neuste Aussichten in die Sternkunde und Metaphysik, mit dem wärmsten Enthusiasm vor die bildende Künste, die er selbst als Dilettante mit wahren Erfolg ausübt.

Er beruft sich auf eine Erfahrung aus dem Brief *sur la sculpture*, wo er bemerkt hatte, daß die Seele nach einer langen Betrachtung ebendesselben Gegenstandes, Ekel und Ueberdruß bey sich empfindet. Diese Eigenschaft legt er zum Grunde, um darauf sein System über die Wirksamkeit der menschlichen Seele zu bauen. Die Seele sucht immer die größte Anzahl von Ideen in dem kürzesten Zeitraum zu genießen, und das, was sie daran hindert, liegt in der Nothwendigkeit, sich gewisser Organen zu bedienen, um sich durch eine Folge von Zeit und Partien durchzuarbeiten. Könnte die Seele ohne Organe von einem Gegenstand gerührt werden, so würde die Zeit,

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die sie brauchte, |298| sich eine Idee davon zu machen, gerade Nichts seyn. Wäre der Gegenstand so beschaffen, daß sie durch die ganze Totalität seiner Essenz davon könnte gerührt werden, so würde die Anzahl der Ideen schlechterdings unendlich seyn: und fänden diese beyden Fälle zugleich statt, so würde die Summe dieser Ideen ohne Medium, und ohne Folge von Zeit und Partien die ganze Totalität des Objekts vorstellen: oder dieses Objekt würde auf die innigste und vollkommenste Weise mit dem Wesen der Seele vereinigt; und alsdann könnte man sagen, daß die Seele dieses Objekt auf die vollkommenste Art genießt. Die Lebhaftigkeit der Begierden, oder der Grad von anziehender Kraft, werden durch den Grad von Homogenität des verlangten Objekts bestimmt; und dieser Grad von Homogenität besteht in dem Grad der Möglichkeit einer vollkommenen Vereinigung. Man wird eine schöne Statue weniger lieben, als seinen Freund, seinen Freund weniger als seine Geliebte, und seine Geliebte weniger als das höchste Wesen. Dieses ist die Ursache, warum die Religion größere Enthusiasten macht, als die Liebe, die Liebe größere als die Freundschaft, und die Freundschaft größere als das Verlangen nach bloß materiellen Dingen. Betrachte ich eine schöne Statue, so suche ich nichts weiter, als mein Wesen mit seiner Essenz zu vereinigen: nach langer Betrachtung aber entsteht Ueberdruß bey mir, und dieser fließt aus keiner andern Quelle, als der stillschweigenden Betrachtung, die ich über die Unmöglichkeit einer vollkommenen Vereinigung gemacht habe. In der Freundschaft scheint die Unmöglichkeit der Vereinigung nicht so groß; und in der Liebe betrügt uns die Natur einen Augenblick; allein, der Ueberdruß, der unmittelbar folgt, zeigt die Unmöglichkeit der Vereinigung evident, die uns, dem Anschein nach, so vollkommen schien. Unter den Mitteln, deren sich die Seele bedient, zu dieser Verei- |299| nigung zu gelangen, verdienen besonders zwey betrachtet zu werden: das eine ist physisch, das andere intellektuel. Jedermann kennt die besondere Harmonie, die sich zwischen unsern Ideen und den Zeugungstheilen unsers Körpers befindet. Von allen physischen Mitteln, deren sie sich zur Vereinigung ihres Wesens mit dem verlangten Gegenstand bedient, ist dieser der stärkste, der sich allenthalben zeigt und einmischt. Ich berufe mich auf alle Schwärmer in der Religion, der Liebe, der Freundschaft, und in den Künsten, die nur materielle Dinge zum Gegenstände haben, ob sie in der Hitze ihrer Leidenschaft, da keine Veränderung empfunden haben, wo PLATO schon den Sitz der Begierde festsetzt. Hierher gehören alle Ausschweifungen der Unreinigkeit, die an dem eignen Geschlechte, dem Marmor und Bronze zu allen Zeiten sind begangen worden. Diese Irrungen der Einbildungskraft entstuden aus nichts, als dieser allgemein anziehenden Kraft, und sie würden ins Unendliche fortgegangen seyn, wenn die Seele nicht zugleich das Vermögen

hätte, dieser Kraft Einhalt zu thun; nicht, daß sie selbe vernichtet, oder ihre Intensität verringert, sondern ihre Wirkung durch Hindernisse erschweret, und sie von einem Objekt zu einem andern Weg leitet. Dieses göttliche Vermögen ist die Stütze der ganzen Moral. Sie kann mit dem verglichen werden, was wir bey der Materie *vis inertiae* nennen; In der Freundschaft würkt alles auf die Hervorbringung dieser Homogenität fort. Von dem ersten Augenblick an, da in einem Cirkel von Unbekannten unsere Wahl auf eine Person insbesondere fiel, arbeitet die Seele unaufhörlich, mehr Seiten der Uebereinstimmung zu entdecken, und die Liebe oder Freundschaft wächst nach Maßgabe dieser Entdeckung. Mit welcher unaufhörlichen Bemühung arbeiten einsamlebende Personen, die Homogenität mit ihrem Hunde oder einem andern Lieblingsthier, zur Vollkommenheit zu bringen: und mit welchen Liebkosungen bezahlen sie ihm ein wohlverstandnes Wort, oder eine neue erworbene gemeinschaftliche Idee mit Ihnen.

Bey den Griechen hatte Liebe und Freundschaft ohngefähr eben die Bedeutung, wie bey uns; allein, ihr Gefühl und ihre ausserordentliche Empfindsamkeit, gab allen ihren Leidenschaften eine Stärke, die WIR nicht begreifen können, und ihren Tugenden und Lastern einen Glanz, der uns blendet. Die Religion, die eigentlich in nichts besteht, als in dem Verhältniß jedes Individui zu dem höchsten Wesen, und deren Endzweck das höchstmögliche Glück jedes Individui ist, hatte nichts bestimmtes bey den Griechen: Der POLYTHEISMUS machte einen Gegenstand der Cärimonie und Parade daraus. Die bürgerliche Tugend, oder das Vermögen, welches die Handlung, jedes Individui zu dem höchsten Wohl der Gesellschaft leitet, wäre also das einzige, was man zu bearbeiten hatte. Die Gesetzgeber, ob sie gleich meistens VON DER NOTHWENDIGEN EXISTENZ EINES EINZIGEN GOTTES UND SCHÖPFERS überzeugt waren, sahen doch, daß jede Form der Gesellschaft ein Wesen von Menschenhänden war, und daß diese besondere Form gegen Gott kein anders Verhältniß haben könne, als jede andere Uhr oder Maschine. Sie setzten also diese Maschinen nach dem bestmöglichsten Plan zusammen, und modificirten die dirigirende Kräfte jedes Individui nach ihrem Belieben. Sie liessen diese Art von Religion an ihrer Stelle, und bedienten sich ihrer zuweilen mit Geschicklichkeit, weil sie glaubten, das Volk, indem es mit den Göttern umgieng, erhielt dadurch etwas Erhabnes in seiner Denkart. Daraus folgte, daß man jedem Individui eine gewisse Dosis Freyheit liesse, seine Handlung selbst zum höchsten Wohl der Gesellschaft zu bestimmen; und folglich machte es ein mehr oder |301| minder ansehnliches Stück des Staats selbst aus. Da es sich selbst als das Bild des Staats ansähe, so verdoppelten sich seine Kräfte: und dieß brachte nothwendiger weise die Wirksamkeit, den Fleiß, die Ehrbegierde, und die

alles belebende Liebe des Vaterlandes hervor. Bey UNS, die WIR eine Offenbarung haben, ward das Individuum seiner ewigen Fortdauer gewiß. Sein Verhältniß gegen Gott ward bestimmter und bekannter; allein, sein Endzweck ward anders. Es sähe bald, daß sein höchstes Wohl nicht in einer Welt zu finden seye, die durch Zeitfolge existiret; und der Gesetzgeber, welcher fand, daß die bürgerliche Tugend ein wenig dadurch geschwächt wurde, glaubte, das Mittel dagegen in ihrer Vermischung mit der Religion zu finden. Der Staat, oder die Regierung, die ihn vorstellt, und die kein Recht auf die Handlungen des Individui hat, als in sofern sie nothwendige Ursachen von gewissen bestimmten Wirkungen sind, griff seine Absichten, seine Gedanken, und alle Modification seiner Velleität an, die doch nur einzig und allein zu seinem Verhältniß gegen Gott gehören; und das Individuum sah gegentheils in seinen Handlungen nichts mehr, als die einfache Wirkungen seiner Velleität, ohne ihre Verhältnisse mit dem Staat zu betrachten. Die Religion und die bürgerliche Tugend, die getrennt hätten bleiben sollen, schwächten einander wechselseitig; und da die innre Freyheit des Menschen einmal gedrückt und angegriffen war, so folgte natürlicher Weise daraus die Muthlosigkeit und die Trägheit.

Alles, was wir sehen und empfinden, strebt nach der Vereinigung. Indessen ist alles von Individuis, die schlechterdings vor sich bestehen, zusammengesetzt; und ohngeachtet diesem schönen Anschein von einer Kette genau vereinigter Wesen, scheint es klar, daß jedes Individuum existirt um zu existiren, und |302| nicht wegen der Existenz eines andern. Da sich also das Ganze in einem Stand des Zwangs befindet, so folgt daraus, daß ein Urheber da ist, der es zur Vereinigung streben läßt, oder der durch seine Kraft und Natur es in Individua zertheilt hat. Und diesen Urheber nenne ich Gott.

Wir unterschreiben nicht alles in dieser sonderbaren Schrift, deren Seltenheit (denn es existiren nicht mehr als 80 Exemplare) diesen weitläufigen Auszug entschuldigen wird. Die Stellung der Sätze, wie sie aus dem Kopfe eines H. kamen, ist allzeit merkwürdig, und sollte sie auch nichts, als dem Psychologen neue Data zur Genealogie der Ideen an die Hand geben.

Frankfurter gelehrte Anzeigen. Nro. XCI, S. 721-726.

Den 13. November. 1772.

Paris.

Lettre sur l'homme & ses Rapports 1772. 8. 65 S.

Wir freuen uns, diese neuere Schrift des jüngern Herrn HEMSTERHUYS anzeigen zu können. Sie ist eine Fortsetzung der nur flüchtig in dem letztern Brief *sur les desirs* angegebenen Hauptideen seines Systems, die sich noch ferner in einem grössern Werke: *sur les progrès des sciences* entwickeln werden. Es thut uns leid, daß wir beynahe nur obenhin über die wichtigsten Theile dieses Buchs wegeilen, und unsre Leser auf dasselbe selbst verweisen müssen.

Jedes empfindende Wesen kann keine Sensation einer andern Substanz, als durch die Ideen oder Bilder erhalten, die aus dem Verhältniß entstehen, worinn sich dies Wesen gegen diese Substanz befindet, oder das sie von diesem Wesen ABSONDERT Dieses nennt HEMSTERHUYS das ORGAN oder MEDIUM: das heist, er versteht darunter nicht allein das Auge, das sieht; sondern auch das Licht, das sich auf den Gegenstand REFLEKTIRT. Dies empfindende Wesen verhält sich dabey leydend, und diese Art, Ideen zu empfangen, hat der Mensch mit dem Thiere gemein. Ist es aber ein Wesen, das denkt und Schlüsse macht, so hat es Zeichen, die nicht die Gegenstände selbst sind, die aber mit den Gegenständen übereinstimmen; |722| und diese Zeichen hat es in seiner Gewalt. Drey Wege hat das empfindende Wesen zu Ideen zu gelangen, 1.) Durch die Wirkung der Gegenstände, welche die Media oder Organen in Bewegung setzen. 2.) Durch die zufällige Bewegung, die bey Organen, 3.) und durch die Bewegung, die den Organen durch die Zeichen mitgetheilt wird. Die auf dem ersten Wege, durch die Gegenwart des Gegenstandes selbst erzeugte Idee hat unstreitig die meiste Klarheit. Die 2te ist schon ungleich weniger klar, und sehr oft confus, und diejenige, welche die Velleität durch Zeichen hervorbringt, ist schwächer, aber doch ohne die geringste Verwirrung. Die Erfahrung lehrt uns diese verschiedene Grade der Klarheit berechnen. Träumt uns, wir wären am hellen Tage, und wir sehen beym Aufwachen plötzlich den wahren Tag selbst, so bemerken wir den Unterschied der Idee, die durch den wahren Gegenstand, und derjenigen, die durch eine accidentelle Bewegung der Organen hervorgebracht worden. Spielen wir Schach mit geschloßnen Augen, so sehen wir wieder den Unterschied zwischen den Zeichen und dem wahren Objekt. Dem Thiere fehlt die letztere Art, seine Ideen hervorzu-bringen. Da aber seine Ideen auch alle beynahe gleich klar sind, so hat es

gleich starke Leidenschaften, und also — so zu sagen — mehr Nationalcharakter als der Mensch. Wir übergehen nunmehr die Beweise, von dem Unterschiede der Seele und des Körpers, von der Materie, ihrem nothwendigen Anfang, einem ewigen Urheber derselben, u. s. w. Sie erscheinen durch die Stellung und die Sprache, die ihnen Herr HEMSTERHUYS mitzutheilen gewusst hat, in einer sehr interessanten Neuheit. Nur den einzigen Gedanken müssen wir, wegen seiner großen Wichtigkeit, noch anmerken: „*L’Ame ne sent qu’elle agit, que par l’Idée de la reaction. Sans la reaction elle n’auroit aucune idée de sa Velleité.*“ Man sieht schon zum |723| Voraus, wie fruchtbar dieses Principium für die Moral werden muß, und daß sich der Mensch als eine Insel, ohne Gesellschaft, nur als ein verstümmeltes Wesen denken läßt. In Begegnung der Einwürfe von S. 17. an, hat uns besonders gefallen, daß Herr HEMSTERHUYS den Thierenseelen die Ewigkeit nicht gerade abspricht; daß er glaubt, die Forderung, unsre Velleität zu beweisen, sey eben so ungereimt, als die, vom Beweise unsrer Existenz. Indessen rettet er sie doch (S. 20.) sehr scharfsinnig gegen die Materialisten, indem er zeigt, wie sehr sie von der Natur einer bloßen Federkraft unterschieden sey. So lange die Seele durch Media und Organen ihre Ideen erhält, wird sie nie in das wahre Wesen der Dinge dringen. Der Mensch sieht in der Schwere der anziehenden Kraft, der *Vis inertia* eine beständige Wirkung und Gegenwirkung, und daraus schließt er, daß mehr Principia des Würkens in der Welt sind, als Wirkungen. Dasjenige, was macht, daß eine Sache das ist, was sie ist, nennt H. die *Vis inertia*; und das, was verursacht, daß sie an diesem Ort, oder in diesem Verhältniß mit andern Dingen ist, nennt er die ANZIEHENDE KRAFT. Nun zeigt er, daß im Grunde diese beyde Kräfte auf einerley Art würken, daß sie einander nicht entgegen stehen, und daß, wenn nichts in der Welt wäre, das ihnen entgegen stünde, bald alles auf die Einheit zurückgebracht seyn würde. Auch die HOMOGENEN und HETEROGENEN Theile, woraus alle Materie zusammengesetzt ist, und deren Spiel gegen ein ander, würde diese endliche Einheit nicht verhindern, wenn wir nicht, wie bey den Planeten, überall eine *Vis centrifuga* annehmen, die der *vi attractionis* entgegen gesetzt ist. Von der Fortpflanzung der Seelen eröffnet Hemsterhuys seine Gedanken nicht, sondern er führet S. 26. eine sonderbare Erfahrung an, die geprüft und überdacht zu werden verdient. |724| Da nun der Mensch diesen ewigen Streit zweyer entgegen gesetzten Principien sieht, so muß er daraus den nothwendigen Schluß machen, daß die Welt nicht durch sich, sondern durch einen andern existire. So wie das Auge und das Licht mir Ideen von sichtbaren Dingen geben, so giebt mir das Herz, und die Gesellschaft, oder die Gemeinschaft mit denkenden Wesen, mit wirkenden Principien, Ideen von wirkenden Velleitäten, oder es zeigt mir die moralische Seite der Welt.

Dieses Medium aber unterscheidet sich dadurch von den übrigen, indem es mir eine Seite zeigt, von der MEINE SEELE, MEIN ICH ein Theil ist. Mein ICH wird also selbst ein Gegenstand der Betrachtung; denn es giebt uns dieses Medium, nicht allein wie die übrigen, das Verhältniß der Dinge ausser uns zu empfinden, sondern auch das Verhältniß, worinn WIR mit diesen Dingen stehen; das heist, die erste Idee der Pflicht. Nun kommt der Verf. auf die ZEICHEN, andern sich verständlich zu machen, und hier kommen vom S. 31. an, die merkwürdigsten Beobachtungen über die GEBÄRDEN und deren nothwendigen Einwirkung vor, daraus zieht er (S 35.) den Schluß, daß der Mensch, vermöge seiner Natur, Zeichen, sich mitzutheilen, oder eine bestimmte Sprache haben müsse; nicht eine solche, deren Wörter durch den Ton die bezeichnete Sache nachahmen, sondern deren Worte, die nothwendige Resultate der Bewegung sind, die dem Organ der Stimme durch die erste Bewegung eingedruckt worden, das die Idee vorzustellen diene. Hätte der Mensch dieses moralische Medium nicht, so würde er nur WÜRKUNGEN, und WEDER GUTES NOCH BÖSES, nachahmen. Das Gute und Böse sind einander nicht entgegen gesetzt; es ist die Modifikation der Societät und unsrer Handlungen in Absicht auf sie, die uns gerade in die Mitte gestellt hat zwischen das, was wir gut und böse nennen. Machte man den |725| Einwurf, daß bey Pflichten und Begierden diese paßive Empfängniß der Ideen durch ein Medium nicht statt haben könnte, so antwortet HEMSTERHUYS, dies ist gerade aber doch der Fall bey Gewissensbissen, wo das ICH ein Gegenstand der Betrachtung wird. Die Reitzbarkeit oder Vollkommenheit dieses moralischen Organs bestimmt also allen Werth der Menschen und ihrer Handlungen und Pflichten. *La perfection de l'organe moral differe dans tous les individus; par consequent deux individus quelconques ont proprement des devoirs differents à remplir: non par rapport aux loix factices & machinales de la société, mais par rapport aux loix naturelles, & à l'ordre éternel, qui dérive de la coëxistence des choses. Il y a des hommes, dont l'organe moral est si sensible, ou dont la conscience sent des rapports si éloignés, que pour ainsi dire, ils ne peuvent être membres de la société actuelle.* Nun folgt die helle Seite des Gebäudes, und man entdeckt von diesem Gesichtspunkt aus, die herrlichsten Aussichten über RELIGION, GESETZGEBUNG und SPRACHE, die wir unsern Lesern selbst zu genießen überlassen. Uns muß es genügen, sie durch den dunkeln Vorhof und die wunderbaren Säulengänge dieses Tempels begleitet zu haben. Die christliche Religion verliert auch hier vor dem ruhigen wägenden Blick des Philosophen nichts, sondern sie erhebt sich über alle Gespielen, die vor ihr und neben ihr den Erdboden bedeckten. Man lese S. 49-55. nach. Noch eine Stelle erlauben uns unsre Leser herzusetzen. Der Ton wenigstens zeigt, wie sehr dem Verf. die Wahrheit am Herzen liege, *Il n'y a rien au monde de plus respectable, que des*

Theologiens & des philosophes tels qu'on en voit encor de nos jours. Mais d'un coté de soi-disant Orthodoxes, dont la roideur, l'entêtement, la stupidité, le peu de lumières, & l'ambition outrée leur font préten- |726| dre que tous les hommes devoient penser & comprendre comme eux, & qui ne reflechissent pas, que s'il y avoit des preuves contre la religion chrétienne la plus forte sans doute, seroit celle que la parole de Dieu auroit besoin de leur interpretation. Und dann das eben so rüudige Geschlecht der so genannten Philosophen, qui ont fait taire leur organe moral pour un tems, qui voudroient convertir tous les hommes, afin que personne ne leur fit entrevoir un Dieu tout présent, qu'ils redoutent &c.

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Hemsterhuis Studies

Novalis

Translated, Annotated, and Introduced by James D. Reid*

What follows is a complete translation of Novalis's excerpts from and comments upon the writings of the Dutch philosopher François Hemsterhuis (1721-1790), composed in the fall of 1797, as they appear in the second volume of the *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Zweiter Band: Das philosophische Werk II, 360-378). The collection also includes a few brief excerpts from Gehler's *Physical Dictionary* (on mathematics), Herder's essay *Love and Selfhood*, itself a meditation on Hemsterhuis's views on desire, and A. W. Schlegel's essay on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Novalis's interest in Hemsterhuis can be traced back as far as late 1791, at least by way of epistolary anecdote: Friedrich Schlegel observes to his brother August Wilhelm in a letter written in January 1792 that Plato and Hemsterhuis are his new friend's favorite writers. That Novalis was interested in Hemsterhuis in his late teens is nothing surprising, at least not for a young man in touch with some of the chief intellectual trends and currents of his times. Although not well known today, Hemsterhuis was an important figure in Germany throughout the intense period of intellectual ferment between the *Aufklärung* and *Frühromantik* and across philosophical divides. His work, written in French, influenced Herder and Jacobi, several representatives of German Classicism, as well as Novalis and the Schlegel brothers, Hegel, and others. In the context of his reception in the latter half of the 18th century, Hemsterhuis's influence, while not as noisy, is as important as that of Spinoza's, although the thoughts of the younger of the two Dutch thinkers

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fell upon more receptive soil in Germany.¹ His thought brings together interests in modern natural science, concerns about morality and community, the demands of the heart, and the claims of reason in a way that appealed to philosophers invested in the task of thinking about how to find themselves at home in the modern world, at once committed to its enlightened values but searching for deeper sources of significance than reason's abstractions allow. That Hemsterhuis wrote epistles and dialogues rather than philosophical treatises and saw himself as a modern-day Socrates is surely relevant to his reception, too, especially among Romantic thinkers suspicious of the foundationalism of such Kantian philosophers as Reinhold and Fichte.

Hardenberg's interlocking interests in these notes, which will find their first published fruit in 1798 in the collection of fragments called *Pollen*, run the gamut and include, *inter alia*, the interpretation of nature (organic and inorganic and the relationship between the two); the unity of the sciences; the relationship between mind and body, intellect and sensibility, reason and imagination; the being of language and the connection between human thought and signs; the nature of affectivity and feeling and the ostensibly passive sides of human experience; the nature and function of art and genius and their bearing on the course of everyday life; the foundations of morality and politics, including the central problem of political unity that stands at the center of *Faith and Love* and *Christianity or Europe*; the structure and grounds of consciousness and self-consciousness; the nature of philosophy and its history; the problem of education and personal self-cultivation; the nature, scope, and limits of religious belief; and, of course, how all these diverse interests and themes bear upon the quintessentially Romantic quest for an elusive absolute, infinite, or unconditioned. The *Hemsterhuis Studies* are a breeding ground of thoughts on topics central to Hardenberg's work over the course of the next few years, in a line of development and ongoing re-evaluation and interpretation interrupted only by illness and his untimely death in 1801. If the *Fichte Studies* represents Hardenberg's philosophical breakthrough, the *Hemsterhuis Studies* represents his ongoing effort to think through the implications of his fruitful engagement with Fichte in 1795 / 6 and to give his thinking a new direction on issues that stood at the center of

¹ For more on the reception of Hemsterhuis in Germany, see the informative essay by Laure Cahen-Maurel in the second volume of the recently published collected works of Hemsterhuis: "Philosophical Paths: The Legacy of Hemsterhuis's Dialogues in the Age of German Romanticism", in *The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787*, edited and translated by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp. 22-41.

the early reception of Kant and Fichte and that still occupy an important place in contemporary work in the Kantian aftermath.

Most of the issues at stake in the *Hemsterhuis Studies* already show up in some shape in the *Fichte Studies*, and Hardenberg will continue to puzzle over them in the ensuing years, but a few things stand out as marking something of a turning point in or a crystallization of his thinking. It is in these notes on the Dutch thinker that Hardenberg begins to reflect in a more sustained way upon organic phenomena and in a manner that points toward the central role that will come to be assumed by organic paradigms in early German Romantic theories of, e.g., nature and the state and in the organic interpretation of the universe as a whole (in contrast to the mechanical conception inaugurated in its modern form by Descartes). The problem of getting oriented in the whole plays an important part in Hardenberg's subsequent turn (or return) to Kant and is central to almost everything he penned between 1797 and 1800. His emerging views on organs and instruments also bear important relations to his subsequent sketches for a philosophy of what he calls 'magical idealism,' which has too often been saddled with an implausible commitment to wishful thinking. And while Hardenberg continues to view the moral life and philosophy as matters of self-activity, the excerpts and notes translated here reveal an important recognition of the passive and affective dimensions of human existence. One might locate in these reflections the emergence of Hardenberg's longstanding commitment to love (or the affairs of the heart) as the center of our being. To be sure, the experience of passivity and the limits of the self-positing I were already at issue in the *Fichte Studies*, but the lines of thought traced out below reveal a more sustained, if muted, polemic against the one-sided emphasis on the I in Fichtean thought where, in Hardenberg's own subsequent estimation, the phenomenon of love remains homeless. In any event, students of Novalis with interests in his ongoing investment in Fichte's philosophy, and the nature and extent of his disagreement with the same, will find in the *Hemsterhuis Studies* a valuable source of information.

It is also worth observing that Hardenberg is no slavish disciple of Hemsterhuis, no more than he was a mere follower of Fichte, but engages with the former's work in a critical and self-reflective spirit. His excerpts are often paraphrastic and reflect his own interest in making selective use of Hemsterhuis's ideas and trains of thought for his own philosophical purposes. At the center of Hardenberg's concerns, here and elsewhere, stand such large, fundamental, and intertwined questions as: How do we have a world at all? What sort of reality do we inhabit? What makes being-here worthwhile? And how should we talk about things that matter?

Novalis excerpts from and comments upon several of Hemsterhuis's works, including the *Letter on Sculpture* (1769), the *Letter on the Desires* (1770), the *Letter on Man and His Relations* (1772), *Aristée* (1779), *Alexis* (1787), *Simon* (1787), and the *Letter on Atheism* (1787).² Following the format of the *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, Novalis's comments are in 12-point font, everything else in 10-point font. Editorial additions are given in square brackets, including references to the editions of Hemsterhuis used by Novalis. The numbering of the notes and comments, which begins with #14, follows this edition as well. The *Hemsterhuis-Studien* are preceded by 13 numbered excerpts from Fichte, both of which fall under the heading "Philosophical Studies from the Year 1797," which include subsequent notes on related themes in the work of Kant and the German philosopher and physician Adam Karl August von Eschenmayer (1768-1852).

² It is worth noting that no notes survive on Hemsterhuis's dialogue *Sophylus* (1778).

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14. *Evaporation* is a chemical revolution *around the axis*. Every body revolves.

Are warmth and other forces of matter originally and continuously active and *growing*, and now only *inhibited*, like gravity? Like air – It is in the state of compression.

From Gehler.¹

[J. S. T. Gehler, *Physical Dictionary or Attempt at an Explanation of the Most Important Concepts and Technical Terms of the Doctrine of Nature*. Part Three, 1790, p. 158.]

15. Higher mathematics is a mixed science of arithmetic and geometry.

The *calculus of the infinite* discovers the rates at which changing magnitudes change by comparing changing magnitudes / differential calculus / or, conversely, the former by way of the latter / integral calculus. /

Hemsterhuisiana:

[J. G. Herder, *Love and Selfhood: A Postscript to the Letters of Mr. Hemsterhuis on Longing* (1781). *SW* Bd. XV, pp. 308/317/309.]

16. The more spiritual, the more lasting the enjoyment.

No degree of unification among beings is without fruit.

Body and spirit have been mixed by a kind of voluntary drunkenness.

¹ Johann Samuel Traugott Gehler (1751-1795) was a German physicist and lawyer. He is the author of a six-part dictionary of the natural sciences. Novalis excerpts here from the third part, published in 1790.

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Ground of the simplicity of the great man.²

Schlegel Senior.³

[A. W. Schlegel, "On Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliette*." *Die Horen*, 1797, Issue 6, pp. 23/33/43]

17. Did he need an external boundary, perhaps, in order to become conscious of his *free power*?

This superficial similarity between the most common and the highest is the highest triumph of art.

In precisely this way, the poet leads us further into the inwardness of our minds, by lending his characters a more complete organ of communication than [we find] in nature itself.

Partly by Hemsterhuis, partly by me.

[*Lettre sur la sculpture*, Vol. I, p. 6]

18. The one chief end of art is – given nature.

The opposite – *Not-nature*, or a voluntary nature.

The median end – a mixture of the two.⁴

² This last sentence is not taken from Herder's essay but pertains to the following remark in Hemsterhuis's *Simon*: "and this is the reason for that tone of simplicity admired and wondered at in the actions of the truly great man" (*Dialogues, 1778-1787*, 118).

³ Novalis means August Wilhelm, the elder brother of Friedrich.

⁴ These comments pertain to Hemsterhuis's views on art and the imitation of nature. The following passage from the *Letter on Sculpture* is relevant: "The primary goal of all the arts is to imitate nature; the second [is] to enrich nature by producing effects that it does not produce easily, or that it cannot produce" (*Early Writings, 1762-1773*, 61).

Sur les Desirs [On the Desires].[*Lettre sur les desirs*, Vol. I, p. 57-85]

19. Without organs, the soul would be permeated by the infinite object *in the instant* – both would become one – and the mutual enjoyment would be complete. [p. 62]

Where it requires organs, as in its entire present state, that ideal of enjoyment remains an unattainable idea [p. 63] – an eternal *attraction*, which it would cease to be through its attainment.

Hence, it is a *subjective* idea that grows just as the soul grows – an *indefinite* task – that can never be solved, because it is solved in infinite ways, always only relatively.

Through the enduring possibility of the expansion of the object – the complete unification remains always futural.

20. The force of inertia, which restricts the force of attraction, is the excess of the conductive force over the equilibrium of attractions, or the generative forces of the cosmos – This excess is the basis of morality and virtue. [p. 69, note 1]

The human being takes pains to appropriate everything that surrounds him and draws near to him – i.e., to make it *homogeneous* with himself – so that he can combine himself with it more easily – ? ? ? ? [p. 73]

The state is a *particular* combination of several human beings within the great state that humanity already constitutes for itself. [p. 75, note 1]

The *point d'honneur* of the old chivalry is what first introduced that absurd formality between *humans* – etiquette is the death of all free humanity – a mixture of petty Asian slavery and despotic pride – with Christian humility. [p. 77]

The consequence of every dissolution into individuals is a communal existence of parts – Every *community* is the source of relations – hence of inalterable laws. [p. 79-80]

Every object – as stimulus of an organ, *consists* of members.

The impression of the object on the soul is the effect of an activity of the object in relation to the soul.

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This action, like actions in general, is divided into intensity and duration.

The intensity is measured by the number of members that act upon the soul. Duration by the time needed by the organ for the soul to produce a living intuition of the whole or of the substance of the object, insofar as it is analogous to the organ.

Hence, of two equally *intense* objects, the one that is easiest to run through, that most quickly imprints itself is – superior. [pp. 82-3: *Remarque générale*]

Sur l'homme et ses rapports [On Man and His Relations].

[*Lettre sur l'homme et ses rapports*, Vol. I, pp. 125-245.]

21. *By me*. Introduction.

The most wonderful, the eternal phenomenon, is *our own existence*. The greatest mystery is the human being itself – The solution to this infinite task is *indeed* world history – The history of philosophy, or of science in general, of literature as substance, contains the attempts at an ideal solution to this ideal problem – of this imagined idea.

This stimulus⁵ can never cease to be stimulating – unless we ourselves cease to be – both in substance and in idea. Hence, just as world history – being *en gros* – does not cease, neither does philosophizing, or *thinking en gros*.

But what if one had not hitherto philosophized? but only attempted to philosophize? – then the previous history of philosophy would be neither more nor less than a history of the *attempts to discover* philosophizing.

As soon as *philosophizing comes to be* there are also philosophemes [*Philosopheme*]⁶ – and the pure natural history (doctrine of nature) of the philosophemes is *philosophy*.

⁵ The German here is *Reitz*, a word that can mean stimulus, incitement, attraction, irritant. I have translated it here as 'stimulus,' but elsewhere as 'incitement.'

⁶ A 'philosopheme' is a philosophical statement, thesis, proposition, or conclusion. Novalis seems to be differentiating between the activity of philosophizing and its various products. But as he observes in the following note, a philosopheme is also a proposition or thought

22. As soon as he begins to think, the human being ascribes every affection to another affection.

/ Every thought is, *in relation to its ground* – a philosopheme. For this is to consider a thought *in the whole* – in its relationship to the whole of which it is a member. /

Hence, for the purpose of explaining, he transfers the concept of cause, which he must imagine for every effect, to a being existing outside of himself – although in another respect he feels himself compelled to believe that he only affects himself – but despite its self-evidence from a higher standpoint, this conviction remains incomprehensible from a lower standpoint, i.e., to the mere understanding – and so the philosopher sees himself, with complete presence-of-mind, *judging in a restricted way*. From the standpoint of mere judgment, there is consequently a not-I [*ein Nichtich*].⁷ Hence, the mysterious incitement of the power of judgment to explain what is eternally inexplicable in this way persists despite the philosopher's supervision, and must remain so for all eternity, so that the intelligence itself might persist.

The human being accordingly feels *passive* only at the level of mere judgment.

Hence, we will never *grasp* ourselves *completely* – but we will and can do *much more* than grasp ourselves.⁸

23. Hemsterhuis.

One can regard *signs* – as means of *recollection*, and as means of *communication*. /At *bottom one*. / [p. 134]

By means of signs the human being has objects in his power – he can bring a remote object near to a present one *in the faculty of representation*, and so produce a coexistence –

brought in relation to its ground in the whole. The term appears to go back no further than the 17th century.

⁷ The language of 'I' and 'not-I' was introduced into philosophical discourse by Fichte.

⁸ This note was incorporated in the *Assorted Remarks* (fragment 6).

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imaginatively – also actually blend the manifold easily – and assimilate it according to one idea.⁹ [p. 135-6]

Hemsterhuis calls the combining faculty of intuition, which deals with signs rather than with objects and coordinates them, *reason*. [p. 136]

An intelligence is all the more perfect the more coexisting ideas it can oversee.

The most perfect intelligence would be able to produce an entire *coexistence* of several or all ideas – The relatively perfect [intelligence would be able] more or less to approach this *perfect coexistence* – They are only more or less *swift* – in the successive overview.

But mere swiftness does not alone constitute perfection, but rather also the clarity and constancy of apperception. [pp. 136-8]

Hemsterhuis's distinction between genius, acumen, understanding, and dullness.

By Dumas.¹⁰

[*Note de M. Dumas*, pp. 138-141]

[24.] Complete conviction is the feeling of absolute truth.

Absolute truth for us is the identity of the *intuition* and the *essence* of an object.

Every genuine axiom is the expression of such an absolute truth.

The common herd holds truth to be quantitative – This is absurd – He confuses it with conviction. Conviction is always in an inverse relationship to the length of the path from the *first axiom* to the *thema probandi* [the object of proof].

If one could concentrate the momentary convictions of all the truths one has run through in a single moment, then the conviction of the derived proposition would be as strong as that of the principle.

⁹ Novalis's interest in the nature and power of signs goes back at least as far as his studies of Fichte (1795/6) and runs throughout his brief philosophical career. The idea that signs grant power over objects comes forward in the very first fragment of *Assorted Remarks*.

¹⁰ Charles-Guillaume-Frédéric Dumas (c. 1725-1780) is responsible for editing the work of Hemsterhuis.

The greater and the more complicated the relationship becomes, the more difficult is its apprehension – but where the feeling of the relationship ends – doubt emerges – hence, one must seek to help oneself by giving the penultimate proposition the absolute value of a principle.

25. By me. / *Understanding* and *reason* express the organs or faculties for relationships /

[26.] Continuation of Hemsterhuis.

Genius gives – great, deep truths – the understanding – *popular* – *universally intelligible* truths – acumen – errors and truths of all sorts mixed together – dullness – dead, unconnected masses.

Vulgar philosophy is the tasteless residue left behind when spirit vanishes. [pp. 141-42]

True logic is that faculty of intuition – so-called logic a miserable palliative.

The sentient being has three natural means – of receiving intuitions.

1. Affection from without.
2. contingent movement of the organ.

/ Dream. Blow to the eye – terror /

3. Affection of the organ through signs. [p. 142]

/ This division does not seem entirely right to me. /

The first is the *clearest*.

The second – the most confused.

The last is the most obscure but thoroughly determined. [p. 143]

Character of the animal faculty of representation. [p. 144]

Instinct is the result of the effect of the faculty of intuition upon a few clear, coexisting ideas. [p. 147]

27. / Hence, instinct and genius would be only quantitatively distinct. /

Everything external that the soul intuits is the point from which it emerges in order to acquire the conviction of its own existence.

Its power of desire gives it to know its existence.

In its counteraction it feels only itself to be active. [p. 155]

With increasing obstacles, the intensity of the power of desire increases.

The individual, particular force of assimilation, or inertia, decreases the more the principle of regularity is weakened – The plant withers if gravity – the *universal* force of *assimilation* – predominates over this particular object. [p. 170]

/ Is this not perhaps also the case with states and individuals? /

Everything in the three kingdoms is composed of *generative mass*. [p. 171]

There must still be a foreign *tendency* toward the whole that hinders the final unification of the members into a single, immeasurable mass – [pp. 171-72]

Theory of the Moral Organ. [pp. 176-180]

The *analogous* – the *mimetic* signs.

His hypothesis that primitive language consists of such analogous signs. [pp. 182ff.]

Harmony and melody are one in the end – Melody is *relative* – *successive* harmony – Harmony is the *heard* relationship between 2 or more coexisting tones. [p. 192, note 1]

The organ of feeling has three kinds of sensation.

1. Impenetrability.
2. Warmth.
3. *Pleasant* contact.

The organ of hearing also – three:

1. Rhythm.

2. Tone.
3. Harmony.

The organ of sight, too:

1. Outline – boundary.
2. Color.
3. Beauty.

The moral organ likewise:

1. Longing or motive.
2. Duty.
3. Virtue.

The last four kinds of all 4 organs have a remarkable affinity, as do their opposite sensations.

*Pain – discord –
Ugliness and vice.* [pp. 192-3]

One should distinguish carefully between the faculty of contemplation and the organ of the heart. The former forms schematic intuitions of the concrete sensations of all the senses. It combines its ideas of duty and longing – into the *product – virtue* – So too its ideas of boundary and color – into the *product – beauty*. In music – tone and rhythm – into harmony – warmth and elasticity into the feeling of pleasure. [p. 193]

On the Sympathy of the Organs. [p. 195]

The principal difference between the moral organ and the others – is – that *the I* is co-apprehended among the objects of this organ, too. [p. 196]

There are human beings so tenderly moral, whose conscience perceives such remote relations that they cannot be members of current society. [p. 200]

Hemsterhuis considers the idea of *property* to be as dangerous as it is false. [p. 203]

All legislation relates to physical relationships – seeks to give them an independent roundness and security – and thus makes morality indispensable – and thereby weakens the moral organ entirely.

Human beings have worked quite persistently [*consequent*] to annihilate virtue and religion almost entirely, as our current constitutions show. [pp. 203-4]

NOVALIS

Prayer works like a restorative drug. [p. 208]

Theory of Revelations.¹¹ [p. 209]

Faith requires a true talent. Some people can have far more faith than others.

Organ of faith. [pp. 210-11]

It is so difficult to get to know a religion *purely*. [p. 213]

The *superstitious sciences* arise through the *activity* of the moral organ upon *the other* (lower) *organs*. [p. 216]

The discovery of the laws of the cosmos.

Pythagoras's unconditioned end of the perfection of the moral organ. [p. 218-19]

/ Are there no binoculars for the same?

By me. /

Love of the fatherland / says **Republicanism** / could do a great deal of good. [p. 222]

Our current religion takes us only so far from true bourgeois virtue.

It is strange that no legislator has attempted the *absolute identification* of divinity and fatherland. [p. 223]

Our current written characters were originally kinds of *notes* – longer or shorter strings, or images taken from the wind instruments – especially *the vowels* – for the purpose of reproducing these tones for the reader.

1. Object script – mimetic script.
2. Representative script.
3. Cipher script. [p. 225-26]

The first cognitions are *isolated* – they contain only disconnected objects.

¹¹ These notes would be worth comparing with Novalis's subsequent essays in politics and religion (*Faith and Love* and *Christianity or Europe*).

The second arise out of the relative coexistence of the first – they are relational cognitions.

The totality of our cognitions, or science in the main, consists accordingly of the sum of the preserved and acquired cognitions – for all relational ideas are the *work* of the human being.

The magnitude of human science is accordingly determined by the sum of the primitive ideas multiplied by the sum of the secondary ideas. [p. 227-28]

The sciences are separated only from a lack of genius and acumen – the relationships between them are too intricate and remote from each other for the understanding and dullness.

We owe the greatest truths of our day to such combinations of the long-separated members of the complete science.

In mathematics, object and idea or intuition are one. [p. 230]

The human spirit revolves around the sun – it has its perihelia and its aphelia.

In every perihelion, a certain spirit sets the tone.

The spirit of taste and morality among the Greeks –
The spirit of calculus among us.

The first perihelion grasped the spirit of the wonderful.

The perfection of our sciences is judged according to their capacity for mathematics. [pp. 230-31]

The all-too-swift increase in ideas of relation results in addiction to combination and application. The person who developed too quickly is still no match for this great task – the *sense* fades and becomes dull – no firm distinction between the true and the false henceforth – accretion of illusions – *frivolity* – *indifferentism* – bagatelle – fatigue – indolence. [pp. 233-34]

NOVALIS

/ *Germes of future organs* – perfectibility of the organs. How can something be made into an organ?¹² /

By Dumas.

[*Note de M. Dumas*, pp. 234-35]

[28.] The universal spirit of each perihelion arises out of the first relational ideas that arise in its *withdrawal* from the aphelion of barbarism.

The determinate condition of the aphelion determines these first expressions of the reaction [*Reaction*] whereby culture as such begins.

Deep ignorance prompts scientific experiments – the strangest things become coupled *coexistents* – the superstitious – the miraculous sciences emerge here. Herein the breeze, the spirit of the miraculous is produced.

Slavery and emigrations lead to political institutions – property – political virtues.

The spirit of politics and morality, and along with it the spirit of taste, comes to predominate.

Out of the monastic spirit, chivalry, and indolence come – / revolutionary – progressive ideas / speculative spirit in everything – preeminent training of the understanding.

29. Hemsterhuis.

The will is in itself infinite – bound to determine laws by way of its organs – restricted.

The theoretical and moral sense follows the soul beyond the grave, too.

The soul seems formed not for knowledge – but for enjoyment and intuition.

This world consists of the *actual* and *possible* – both arise out of a single principle *and are one before God*. Only the human being distinguishes between the actual and the possible.

¹² Questions concerning the development and acquisition of organs, as the tools (Greek, *organon*) with which we are able to alter our surroundings, will prove to be important in the development of what Novalis comes to call ‘magical idealism.’

Before God there is nothing evil. [pp. 237-39]

/ The world – as we now see it, is the sum of our current, from our side *passive* relationships with God. /

The arts have indeed arisen through the excessive expansion and development of the lower faculties – but the most essential organ – *the heart*, has lost?

The development of this organ is reserved for a future existence – the development of this organ is the character of our genuine perfectibility.

Do we know – what discoveries have been reserved for us on this side – ? The moral side of the cosmos is even more unknown and immeasurable than the space of heaven.

/ Moral Arts. /

Aristée.

[*Aristée ou de la Divinité* (Aristée or on the Divinity), Vol. II, pp. 5-106]

30. If there is order in the cosmos, then it is not perceptible, at least not for those who are not masters of the cosmos.

It is relative – It serves only the representation of several objects at once or combined in a series. Objects that have common marks or *common media* (as, e.g., those in *a series*), are capable of order. [pp. 16-19]

Regularity of the relational ideas produces order. [p. 22]

Every being discovers order only the works *of its arts*, only in the productions of its kind that are based on relations of the genus. [p. 23]

Order in general is the *distribution* of things according to the *idea of a determinate* whole – Disorder is an enumeration and distribution of things that does not correspond to the preestablished idea. [pp. 26-27]

/ Neither order nor disorder is there where *no such idea* has an influence on the enumeration and distribution of objects. /

NOVALIS

One can consider the universe from 6 different sides –

1. from the physical.
2. as organic;
3. *active* and *counteractive*.
4. from the intellectual side.
5. from the side of morality.
6. in light of the relationships of its members and the natural laws that arise therefrom. [p. 36]

An organ is an instrument – means to a determinate end.

The work of every finite being

/ Every finite being is an instrument /

is an *organ* – means to a determinate *end*.

A substance produces no limited being. / of course. / [p. 37]

Only by way of analogy with *our art* do we call the parts of nature that seem to occupy themselves preeminently with their reproduction and modification – organs. [p. 38]

Where organization becomes visible – an end is revealed at the same time – a *goal* – Where a *goal* appears – we are driven to an *ideal*, to a *thought* that *precedes* the real, the execution, the object.

Organization is that driving force of the parts – to produce substances. [p. 38-39]

Hemsterhuis considers the material to be absolutely *inert* – without its own principle of motion. [p. 41]

As an intelligence that is *willing*, hence able to overcome its inertia, the human being can form an imaginary universe out of relationships he has within his own power. [pp. 44-45]

★

31. No activity without direction – No direction without a faculty of desire. [p. 45]

/ Finite and infinite attraction – Both are opposed to each other. The former is imperfect – *exchange* – *alteration* is its character – The latter is complete – It is *une et indivisible* – One could say that it is characterized by *fidelity*. / [pp. 55-56]

Legislation has occasioned the mixture of these heterogeneous principles of attraction – Out of this mixture arose *shame*, regret, fear. [p. 57]

Morality is the sum-total of the laws of that infinite principle. [p. 58]

The productions of the willing intelligence *prompt* or incite the moral organ – *maxims* are the basis of moral actions. [pp. 58-59]

Hemsterhuis speaks of *saturation* with moral vital-force – and its relativity – a proportion of its capacity. [p. 59]

He assumes four *special* faculties of soul – imagination – whereby he understands mere capacity as such and the faculty of preservation. / Sensibility and memory. /

2. *Understanding*¹³ – or the power of judgment – the synthetic and analytic faculties – / The imagination is its supplier /

3. Will – faculty of desire – the faculty of being able *to will* and to act / much tautology. /

4. The moral principle – which is passive and active.
/ pathetic and sympathetic – *active* and *coactive*. /

It is active when it identifies with *its I* – judges itself in itself – duties to self, etc. – It is coactive when it identifies with the I of another, adapts the actions of its own I in accordance with this identification – and judges them according to this principle – *duties to others*. [pp. 60-61, note 2]

/ Hence, the inward, sublime gratification of beneficence and virtue – are explicable according to the laws of a *higher physics* / of metaphysics. /

Sensible conviction – intelligible conviction – their alternation. [p. 62]

¹³The context gives us good reason to think that the imagination is the first of the four special faculties of the soul.

NOVALIS

The universe is in the state of a taut spring. [p. 63]

The understanding makes of the *universal* will / a direction toward all sides /, which on that account *wills nothing* – a determinate, submissive will, since it is by nature absolutely inflexible. [pp. 67-68]

Axioms rest upon *sensible* conviction. The artificial, contrived conviction stems from the axiom. The latter [conviction] has suppressed the former – It is so sharply defined – the former [conviction], on the other hand, is as simple as possible – but for this reason so *inconspicuous* – It is also communicable, while the former is not. [pp. 87-88]

Hemsterhuis believes that in the first 2 moments of a perception, the soul is *passive*, in the third, *passive* and *active at once*, and in the 5th and 6th active. The imagination receives. 1. /The heart / which Hemsterhuis here takes as a feeling of pleasure and displeasure – as sensibility – / desires or detests. 2. / The heart determines our conduct. 3. / The understanding reasons about moral sensation. – 4. / The power of the will expresses itself. 5. / [p. 97]

Difference between achieved greatness and high harmony – Themistocles and Socrates.

For the latter [Socrates] happiness does not seem to be the result of favorable circumstances, but rather a true emanation of his essence – *Misfortune becomes good luck through his own touch*. [p. 100]

It is not enough to know that we are capable in this life of beginning a flight that death does not interrupt but rather accelerates, since its continuation depends solely upon the unalterable direction of our free will. [p. 103]

Alexis.

[*Alexis ou de l'âge d'or* (Alexis or the Golden Age¹⁴), Vol. II, pp. 107-185]

32. When the sensation of a need and its object coincide – are mixed – when the drive is saturated by the object – perfect enjoyment is present [*da*]. [p. 121]

Every overwhelming idea or sensation acts like instinct, for instinct is nothing but this. [p. 123]

The less instinct, the *wiser* – The tendency toward wisdom is opposed to instinct. Where wisdom is – equilibrium is – isonomy. [pp. 125-26]

Prejudice is an incompatible, *baseless* – hindering idea – arbitrarily posited – and all the more powerful the more it touches these predicates – The most invincible – will be the *craziest*. [pp. 127-31]

The principle of personality is the *highest principle* in us. The measure of independence and the strength of the same is the measure of wisdom. [p. 132]

One must seek wisdom on this side of the grave not in *génie* but in *moderation*. Combined with genius – it is *epoch*-making – it performs miracles. [p. 132]

Socrates's end was the education of everyone. Pythagoras cared only about a small number of chosen ones. [p. 137]

History – philosophy – poetry – The first gathers – the second orders and explains – [p. 153]
/ The third elevates each individual through choice contrasts with the remaining whole, and when philosophy makes *perfect* poetry possible by the formation of the external whole, or through *legislation*, then poetry is, so to speak, the end of the same, through which it first gains significance and graceful life – for poetry cultivates *beautiful* society, or *the inner whole* – the world-family – the beautiful household of the universe – Just as philosophy, through system and state, combines *the powers* of the individual with the *powers* of the cosmos and the rest of humanity, and strengthens it – and makes the whole into the organ of the individual and the individual an organ of the whole – So too poetry – in *relation to enjoyment* – The whole is the object of

¹⁴ The idea of the Golden Age is an important one in Novalis's developing thought. This is, I believe, one of the earliest occurrences of the term in the literary remains.

NOVALIS

individual enjoyment, and the individual is the object of total enjoyment. Through *poetry* the highest sympathy and coactivity – the most intimate, the most glorious society becomes actual. / Through philosophy – it becomes possible.

Everything is transformed into a *thrilling pleasure* – to be sure, this pleasure is not pleasure in the usual sense.

Genuine poetic enjoyment – strengthens – instead of weakening, as common enjoyment does – /

By me.

33. The power of the imagination to condense, to concentrate is the power to produce the beautiful and the sublime. [pp. 157-58]

Genius and divine inspiration work in the same way – they often seem mixed. / Enthusiasm is light and warmth – But there is also light without heat. / The spirit of poetry is the morning light that makes the statue of Memnon resound. [p. 158]

A swift apperception is *tact* [Tact] in the uncommon sense. [p. 161]

[34.] Wishes and desires are wings – There are wishes and desires – that are so poorly fitted to the state of our earthly life that we can safely infer a state where they become pinions that will elevate them into an element of their own, and an island where they can settle. [cf. pp. 164-65]

[35.] Hemsterhuis has a glorious passage here on the spirit and the letter in philosophy [p. 168]. According to him, the letter is only an *aid* to philosophical communication – the authentic essence of which consists in thinking things *through* [*Nachdenken*]. The speaker only guides the course of thought in the hearer – and in this way it becomes true thought. *He thinks* – and the *other thinks along* [*denkt nach*]. Words are an unreliable medium of forethought [*Vordenkens*]. The genuine truth must by nature *show the way* [*wegweisend*]. It is meant, therefore, only to bring someone onto the right path, or, better, to give him a definite direction toward the truth. He arrives at the place and position, then, on his own, if he is otherwise *active* and *desires* to arrive at the truth. The presentation of philosophy consists accordingly of palpable themes, starting-points – differentiating propositions – determinate

prodding propositions [Stoßsätzen] – It [philosophy] is only present for the active, for the lover of truth – the *analytical* exposition of the theme is only for the lazy or *unpracticed* – who must first learn to flee his *mother* and to maintain a definite direction for himself.

Every attentiveness to an object, or every definite direction (the two are one) – produces *a real relationship* – For along with this distinction, we simultaneously sense the *object's force of attraction*, or the individual force of striving, begin to preponderate – which we surrender to and do not lose the sentiment of, but rather hold firmly in view – bringing us happily to the aim of our longing.

Hence, genuinely complete philosophizing [*Gesamtphilosophieren*] is a shared movement toward a beloved world – in which we mutually detach ourselves from our preeminent posts that demand the greatest exertion (which we renounce) against the antagonistic element. We follow the sun and tear ourselves loose from the position that, according to the laws of the movement of our planet, conceals a long era in cold night and mist. / Dying is a genuinely philosophical act. / by me.

36. Certain restraints are like the fingerings of a flute-player, who, in order to bring forth different tones – stops now this hole, now that – and who seems to make the most arbitrary combinations of sounding and silent holes. By me.

Synthesis of colors in white light.

Simon.

[*Simon or des facultés de l'âme* (Simon or on the Faculties of the soul), Vol. II, pp. 187-277]

37. Art has two branches – it has in part the end of serving, entertaining, / and perfecting by means of enjoyment / *the body* – in part, the preserving, amusing / and graceful cultivation of / *the soul*. [p. 216-17]

/ Is there not also the use, enjoyment, and agreeable progression of *the whole* human being? /

NOVALIS

Hemsterhuis calls the arts of civility, war, and ship-building mixed arts – and all the arts of the first sort [are mixed], insofar as they are capable of a certain *ornamentation*.

The two principal means of the 2nd sort are – affection through the objects or *their seeming* itself – or through signs, by means of which they demand that the reader or listener produce within himself the signified objects themselves. The poet and rhetorician commonly employ the latter means, the other artists the former. Still, they also employ *the notes* as well as the *dramatic* theme – that of the former means. [pp. 271-18]

/ Much more remains to be said on this score. /

Everything is matter that comes to us by means of the organs.

Difference between *vehicle* and *organ* – Air, light, etc. are vehicles. The capacity of vehicles is extremely different – as are the proportional relations of their mixtures. So, e.g., air is much slower than light – and water again slower than air. [p. 229]

/ Is air a dense or a fluid material – likewise the ether? The ether seems to me still much denser than air – because ether *travels* so *quickly*. /

If Orion were the only *visible* object – But its light, thanks to the brevity of its emergence and its tremendous breadth, would not have reached us; we would be blind and would not know that we had such an organ as the eye. [pp. 229-30]

/fiat applicatio. /

[38.] The will is neither a *means* nor an *organ*. [p. 233]

Passive and active parts of the moral organ – They behave like imagination and the power of judgment. [p. 234]

A common human being deserves neither praise nor blame – Society does not punish him – it merely keeps itself secure from him. [p. 236]

A person with great sensitivity of the moral organ, but without activity of the same – is equally capable of virtue and vice.

A person whose will easily *disintegrates into determinate willings*, or whose will is easily mixed with the remaining senses, with *specific* objects, whose moral organ is deficient, or suppressed by arbitrariness, so that the individual willings of the same are not assessed according to the idea of justice and injustice – whose understanding is richly endowed and well-practiced,

whose imagination is lively and unabating – this is a truly evil person – The more perfect his remaining senses, the more evil.

A perfectly harmoniously cultured human being with equally energetic dispositions.

In such a one, all the senses act and perceive almost simultaneously and in the most glorious congruence. [p. 236-238]

6 classes – the thoroughly immature – the poor in spirit, the mediocre, the tremendously imperfect – the genuine villains – the genuinely wise. [p. 240]

/ Conclusiveness – inconclusiveness.¹⁵ /

With *inconclusive* willpower, one must not seek to enrich – the imagination that will be the *guide* of the same. One ought to observe a rigorous *ordering* and *selection* among the objects with which one mixes it – and to give the understanding the *greatest education possible* – so that the imagination, as the highest cause, although poor, still acts *regularly*.

Where a prominent *power of moral judgment* reveals itself, one should turn all one's labor to the equally strong education of the remaining faculties of the mind.

Impetuous desires and lively representations among weak hearts make the weakening of all organs necessary in order to prevent the outbreak of ruinous power, or one should at least put unbroken and unexpected obstacles in the way of the passions, while simultaneously occupying the understanding, in order to accustom the imagination to necessity and law.

The faculty of determining, or the will, cannot really be strengthened or weakened; but through motives that one draws partly from the imagination, partly from the heart, its expressions can be made more frequent or rarer – namely, if one *exercises* it more or less.

/ The more one stimulates or assumes them. / [p. 243]

/ Don't age and fate necessarily alter our relationships and forces?
Shouldn't the long, strenuous employment of each organ more or less
exhaust it and rob it of its sensibility and activity? /

By me.

¹⁵ The German means 'conclusiveness,' but the context makes it clear that Novalis means it in a practical sense, not a merely logical one, something more like 'resoluteness.'

NOVALIS

The moral sense / the sensible side of the heart / is the most beautiful, but also the most dangerous side of our essence.

Its too-great vitality easily induces illusions. An all-too-great pliability toward the same, whereby one is easily misled by the incipient tendency to many good things – gradually gives rise in him to the dominance of habit – His sharpened sensibility, his freer leeway makes him the most dangerous despot, who is just as strongly affected by immoral affects too, and who sits around all the more firmly, since through seemingly virtuous actions the person is brought down to the deepest hypocrisy against himself – Without connection to the active heart, the power of moral judgment and the understanding, it may never be – it requires a sharper supervision than the most lively imagination, because it rules the will much more despotically – Only in that connection does it become an eternal source of pure happiness – the grace of wisdom.

Through the *selection* of purposive *stimulants* of the moral sense / which one could call the rational imagination or *sensibility* / and, through the sustained employment of the same, *practical reason*, the power of moral judgment, is posited in *secure*, sustained activity – In just this way, the understanding or theoretical reason is formed through continuous exercise, / i.e., *the constant, widespread attention* to this kind of functioning *of the organ of the soul in general*, and the accompanying striving to reproduce this function and to modify or apply it in manifold ways, gives to the instruments of the same such a facility that afterwards every stimulus, even the mildest, the *most indirect*, and the remotest, be it directed to whatever special organ it will, sets these tools into a congruent activity. / The imagination partly forms vital intuition – *praxis* – through *enrichment*, partly the understanding, through a suitable direction – / whereby, in the end, it becomes a skillful, *understanding* servant of the same and lightens its work – while it already *grasps thing understandingly*. / [p. 244]

The thoroughly free soul becomes, in the end, a *perfect organ*.

Our organs are now separate – In future, the spaces between the senses will be filled in with other sensations – All sensations unify themselves and constitute only appearances of one organ. [p. 248]

Lettre sur L'Athéism [Letter on Atheism].[*Lettre de Dioclès à Diotime, sur l'athéisme*, Vol. II, pp. 279-295]

39. / Religions are the first attempts at philosophy. God is at the same time the first cause of all things. Multiplication of causes. *Seeking out* the *how* of this causality. Wars of the gods. *Homogène – Oxi-gène*. / [pp. 282-285]

The human being searches everywhere *outside of himself* for that which is *most appropriate to himself* – the I – the agent of each thing.

The human being searched prematurely for the cause of the cosmos. [p. 285] The expression of this law required, in order to be *intelligible*, a spirit that could make the universe and made it actual *in himself* – / *potentia*. / Hemsterhuis believes that the human being must be satisfied with external, symptomatic cognition of the structure of the cosmos. [p. 286]

/ Solution to a problem – A problem is thus a solid, synthetic mass that one – dissects – by means of the *penetrating* power of thought. So, conversely, fire is that power of thought in nature – and each *body* a problem. /

/ Dynamic chemistry. /

We only know insofar as *we make*.

/ God creates in no other way than we do. He only composes. [*Aristée*, Vol. II, p. 96] Is creation his work? Then we are also *his work* – We can only come to *know* creation as his work to the extent that we *ourselves* are *world* – cognition is advancing – when we become more divine. Does God know himself? That is absurd. The higher point of view stands against the lower or the inferior. The transcendental point of view is divided into these two kinds.

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Miscellaneous

Varia

Varia

Miscellanea

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Heinrich von Kleist and the Problem of Actuality

Paradise Through the Wrong Door

*Daniel J. McClennan**

ABSTRACT

This work aims to pull at the strand of the problematic actual which, I will argue, underpins the works of Heinrich von Kleist. I argue that Kleist identifies actuality as a problem inherent in Immanuel Kant's critical philosophy, but rather than being blindsided by the Kantian philosophy as he claims in his 'crisis' of 1801, he brought this issue into his reading (or misreading as many call it) of Kant. As the mode of judging empirical veracity - relying on sensual confirmation for the validity of its concepts - actuality is what Kleist tries to reconcile with his desire for transcendence. We see this friction pushed to an apex of escalation, error and death in his works. If Kleist's 'crisis' was indeed about this friction, what are we to take from a Kleistian barred, or at least, problematic transcendence when reading his works?

Keywords: Kleist, Kant, actuality, transcendence, crisis

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Arbeit zielt darauf ab, das problematische Konzept des Tatsächlichen herauszuarbeiten, welches, so meine These, den Werken Heinrich von Kleists zugrunde liegt. Dabei argumentiere ich, dass Kleist die tatsächliche Welt als ein inhärentes Problem in der kritischen Philosophie von Immanuel Kant identifiziert, aber anstatt von der kantischen Philosophie überrumpelt zu werden, wie Kleist in seiner "Krise" von 1801 behauptet, bringt er dieses Problem in sein Verständnis (oder Missverständnis) von Kant ein. Kleist versucht die tatsächliche Welt als Kriterium der empirischen Wahrhaftigkeit, die sich auf die sinnliche Bestätigung der Gültigkeit ihrer Begriffe stützt, mit seinem Wunsch nach Transzendenz zu versöhnen. Wir sehen diesen Versuch in seinen Werken bis zur Eskalation, zum Irrtum und zum Tod getrieben. Wenn es bei Kleists "Krise" tatsächlich darum geht, was sollen wir dann bei der Lektüre seiner Werke von einer Kleistschen verschlossenen oder zumindest problematischen Transzendenz halten?

Stichworte: Kleist, Kant, Wirklichkeit, Transzendenz, Krise

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*It seems that I shall become another of the many victims of folly whom Kantian philosophy has on its conscience... I cannot wrest myself from its chains. The idea that we can know nothing, nothing at all, about truth in this life... has upset me in the very sanctity of my soul. My sole and highest aim has vanished. I no longer have one. Since then, I abhor books.*¹

Heinrich von Kleist

There is much in Kleistian scholarship that is agreed upon – the capricious temperament of the man himself, a world seemingly set against the protagonist in which eruptions of contingency thwart them at every turn, but perhaps most infamous of all: the adverse effect of the *Kantische Philosophie* on the twenty-four-year-old Kleist, which appears to have precipitated a crisis – the ‘Kant Crisis’ of 1801. The reason for the greater infamy of Kleist’s crisis presumably stems from the fact that ten years later (1811), at 4pm on November 21st on the bank of the Wannsee river, he shot himself immediately after shooting the terminally ill Henriette Vogel in a joint suicide pact. This period (1801-1811) contains ostensibly the entirety of Kleist’s literary career and, whilst short temporally, offers a surfeit of idiosyncratic works that hold clues as to what Kleist took from Kant. The temptation is to ask, ‘what caused the Kant crisis?’ But there isn’t a particular citation, or a specific sentence in a particular work we can seek to answer this. Rather, a more fruitful question might be: taking Kleist at his word – that Kant had induced him into throes of despair and uncertainty – what problem does the spectre of Kant in Kleist’s writings bring out into the open?

Section one will be centred around examining the credibility of Kleist’s claim, tracing his reaction in his letters to his fiancé Wilhelmine von Zenge and his cousin Marie von Kleist and cross examining them against what Kant himself writes. Why – even though the element of ‘critique’ in Kant’s *First Critique* is offered precisely in the capacity of finding the boundaries of reason for its more productive use – does Kleist read Kant’s prescriptive, proper use of reason as agitating to a deadly degree? It is between Kleist’s eisegesis of Kant and Kant himself that we will address that which appears to grow in volume the more we read each thinker through one another; a problem inherent in actualising transcendent thought. This unspoken but apparent preoccupation with the mode of the actual driving Kleist will be the hinge of this entire work and towards the end of this section we will define more

¹ Heinrich von Kleist, Berlin, March 23, 1801, to Ulrike von Kleist. Philip B. Miller, ed., *An Abyss Deep Enough: Letters of Heinrich von Kleist* (New York: E.P Dutton, 1982), 97. All images by author, many thanks to Howard Caygill, Peter Osborne, and two anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

clearly what we mean by actuality, through a Kantian lens to ground that which follows.

In section two, the task begins of taking this strand of actuality and following it through two of Kleist's works, chosen for their different formal deployment in problematising actuality. The first will be *Das Erdbeben in Chili*, a story in which we see plotline acrobatics pulling the mode of the actual into myriad forms before a catastrophic missed transcendence. In staging situations where characters are tested beyond reasonable means, Kleist shows the problem of characters stuck in the actual aspiring for the transcendent and the problems this causes – the world that just won't play along, the God that doesn't offer redemption, the love that doesn't save anyone. This tale demonstrates Kleist presenting his characters with a slippery actuality which dupes them, perhaps like it did him. Section three will explore the tragic play, *Penthesilea*. Here one can see how Kleist uses the stage to drive the escalation of actuality to gory heights, utilising *teichoscopia* to full effect. If the effect of this escalation is rendered teichoscopically, what drives this escalation? *Penthesilea* shows us how Kleist destabilises the apparent safety of Kant's actual, which he presents in the form of a battleground, it is a symphony of errors in concert with one another, is the grisly outcome avoidable for us all if we can just reason more effectively?

1. A Crisis of Actuality

First I climbed the hill, and saw the two strangers seated in a shallow trench that was to be found there, the lady fallen backwards and facing upwards, the man however with his lower body crouching somewhat in the trench and fallen forward on the edge, to the right hip of the lady. His hands rested on his knees and a small pistol at his feet, at the bottom of the trench. A large pistol was lying at the edge of the trench, and a third small pistol was on the table around eight paces from the corpses ... I pulled up the male into a straight position so he would not become stiff in that position and difficult to bury.

Court Officer Felgentrev²

a) Kant the Accused

Whilst it's fair to say Kleist didn't receive Kantianism well, there are varying readings of what it was *about* Kant's work that troubled him so.³ There isn't

² From the official report of the court officer Felgentrev, justice in Heinersdorf, November 22 and December 2, 1811, and an eyewitness account. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 208.

³ Hinrich C. Seeba comments on the trial format often used by Kleist – “In Kleist's dramatic court of truth, it seems, the cognitive power of metaphorical language is constantly being tested. Its most powerful structure is, of course, the dramatic trial, a truth-finding interrogation ...” in “The Eye of the Beholder: Kleist's Visual Poetics of Knowledge,” *A*

even agreement on the work that Kleist had read; most assume that Kant's apparent weapon of choice was his first *Critique*, yet you'll find murmurings concerning the third.⁴ Further, there are those who think the 'crisis' was decidedly *post*-Kantian, pointing the finger squarely at Fichte⁵ or even *pre*-Kantian.⁶ Yet it is Kleist himself who incriminates the epistemological heir to Copernicus' revolution,⁷ calling himself another one of the "victims of folly of which the Kantian philosophy already has so many on its conscience."⁸ It is important that we assess the credibility of this statement if we are to understand Kleist. It could (and indeed will) be argued that Kleist isn't being entirely honest with himself, and, if this is the case, we're led to ask what Kleist's misreading of Kant yields.

Kleist seems to paint Kant as the great destroyer, yet Kant's defence might be that he was clearly concerned with pulling the burgeoning of man's reason back from unruliness, by assigning to it limits for its proper use.⁹ Kant

Companion to The Works of Heinrich von Kleist, ed. Bernd Fischer (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2003), 112. Even if Kleist overlooked the *spirit* of the first *Critique*, one could propose, quite convincingly that he borrowed some aspects of the *format*. Proving this point is not the purpose of this piece but, it does show the rhetoric of *opposition* Kleist took from Kant. Claudia Brodsky even goes as far as to describe Kleist as "Kant's literary *Doppelgänger*" (even if it is more in the spirit of the 'problem of representation' that the two share). C. Brodsky, *The Linguistic Condition: Kant's Critique of Judgment and the Poetics of Action* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 194.

⁴ "(The) ... *Kantkrise* in 1801 was famously prompted by a misreading of the third critique that led Kleist to despair of ever being certain of anything in the world." Elwood Wiggins, "Kleist's Four Causes: Narration and Etiology in *Das Erdbeben in Chili*" *MLN* 130/3 (2015): 605. Wiggins seems to address James Phillips' apparent leanings towards the third *Critique* in *The Equivocation of Reason: Kleist Reading Kant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007). I, however read James Phillips as exploring a Kleistian reading of Kantianism through *varying* works of Kant. See also Bernhard Greiner's "The Performative Turn of the Beautiful: "Free Play" of Language and the "Unspeakable Person"" in *A Companion to The Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, 136.

⁵ See Ernst Cassirer, *Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie in Idee und Gestalt* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971). Also, D.F.S Scott – "Kleist's crisis would seem to owe much more to the pessimistic transcendentalism expressed in Fichte's *Sonnenklarer Bericht* than to the more optimistic ideas of Kant's *Kritiken*." "Heinrich von Kleist's Kant Crisis," *The Modern Language Review* 42/4 (1947): 483.

⁶ Humean, even - see Tim Mehigan's "Betwixt a false reason and none at all?: Kleist, Hume, Kant, and the "Thing in Itself", in *Heinrich von Kleist: Writing after Kant* (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 165-188.

⁷ Even a Kant who was Kleistian! See Carol Jacobs, "The Style of Kleist," *Diacritics* 9/4 (1979): 55.

⁸ Heinrich von Kleist, Letter of March 23, 1801 to Ulrike von Kleist (UvK), P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 97.

⁹ To prevent reason "fall[ing] into obscurity and contradictions" Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A viii. Indeed, in the introduction to Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood's edition

says in the A preface of the first *Critique* that “the duty of philosophy was to abolish the semblance arising from misinterpretation” and again from the A preface – “I flatter myself that... I have succeeded in removing all those errors that have so far put reason into dissension with itself in its nonexperiential use.”¹⁰ Here we see that the transgression into the realms of the ‘nonexperiential’ is what leads to these ‘semblances’ putting reason into ‘dissension with itself.’ Kant is drawing as out-of-bounds the use of man’s reason without its empirical material of experience. Kant foresaw the necessity of the casualties of his project however and yet believed in pulling reason back to safety despite this, “even if many prized and beloved delusions have to be destroyed in the process.”¹¹ Kleist clearly falls into this category of those whose ‘delusions’ had to be shattered for the greater good of saving man’s reason.

Even though the jury is still out on the exact source of crisis within the critical philosophy, discussion invariably gravitates around the consequences of the noumenal / phenomenal split which apparently enlightens Kleist to the horrifying prospect that “truth is nowhere to be known here on earth.”¹² Kant ostensibly demonstrates that we can’t know the thing-in-itself, only the world of appearances, reducing experiential material into ‘appearances’ partially generated by the pure intuitions of spatio-temporality. Pushing away the ‘truth’ of the ‘thing-in-itself’ out, over the horizon of the thinkable / perceptible limit *could* be seen as a devastating blow, but again the thing-in-itself as the hinge of Kant’s project in the first *Critique* is 1. Produced in the interest of redemption, but also, 2. Even seen as grounds of subjective *empowerment* for the likes of Fichte and Hegel whose idealism is centred on this splitting as connoting a sort of *liberation* in thinking which radically amplifies the role of subjectivity in post-Kantian thought.

b) The World Through Green Glasses

As an example of Kant’s redemptive attempts, we could use the first section of the antinomy of pure reason, ‘The System of Cosmological Ideas’. In this section of the transcendental dialectic, the problem is explicated as follows: The series of conditions leading to the conditioned object we apprehend (always under the concept that all conditions must have a condition) – all of those conditions must be present in the object apprehended all the way back

of the *Critique of Pure Reason* they tell us that “Kant ... felt he had to *rein in* the pretensions of traditional metaphysics” (emphasis by author), *ibid.* 2

¹⁰ *Ibid.* A xii.

¹¹ *Ibid.* A xiii.

¹² March 22, 1801, to Wilhemine von Zenge (WvZ). P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 95.

along the chain to the *unconditioned*,¹³ and yet, we have no possible experience of a first or, *unconditioned* cause for these conditions, a *causa sui*. Kant's solution is to tell us that the unconditioned – the cause of itself – must be strictly *noumenal* and all the resulting conditions from it *phenomenal*.¹⁴ Kant imposes a limit, a boundary to keep that which can't be experientially reconciled out of play so that phenomenal data still adds up – the understanding and its categories are appeased by this move, in their strict service to providing the transcendental conditions for experience, the series of conditions can still stand if we posit the *causa sui* as noumenal, that is, outside of the time designation necessary to determine an object of experience.¹⁵

This salvages reason's attempts at unity but also "leaves room for faith"¹⁶ in that there can still be a first cause, only outside of possible perception. Fichtean idealism, for example, would take this even further and tell us that all of the empirical consequences, all that is *phenomenal* is purely the self-affecting potential of the absolute I, which one could reasonably argue is more terrifying in terms of object-loss than a cognitive edifice which partially constructs the world but still completely relies on 'given' empirical material for verification.¹⁷ Kant's transcendental philosophy actually aims to salvage the reason Kleist seems to hold so dear (providing a sort of instruction manual for its proper use) whilst also maintaining the importance of the empirical realm.

Kleist (potentially, with a little help from Karl Leonhard Reinhold)¹⁸ –

If everyone saw the world through green glasses, they would be forced to judge that everything they saw was green, and could never be sure

¹³ See I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B436

¹⁴ The phenomenal here as 'appearance' – "If I am dealing with appearances, which as mere representations are not given at all if I do not achieve some acquaintance with them ... then I cannot say with the same meaning that if the conditioned is given, then all the conditions (as appearances) for it are also given; and hence I can by no means infer the absolute totality of the series of these conditions." Ibid, B527/A499

¹⁵ "Accordingly, the antinomy of pure reason in its cosmological ideas is removed by showing that it is merely dialectical and a conflict due to an illusion arising from the fact that one has applied the idea of absolute totality, which is valid only as a condition of *things in themselves*, to *appearances* that exist only in representation ..." Ibid, A506/B534 (emphasis by author). That is, things in themselves as noumena and appearances as phenomena.

¹⁶ "Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith ..." Ibid, B xxx.

¹⁷ See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man* (Dumfries: Anodos Books, 2019), 40.

¹⁸ "For it was Reinhold from whom Kleist may have borrowed his famous metaphor of the 'green glasses' that literally taint the perception of reality." H.C. Seeba, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 107.

whether their eyes saw things as they really are, or did not add something of their own to what they saw. And so it is with our intellect.¹⁹

Here we see Kleist apparently lamenting the uncertainty of the thing-in-itself, that the only ‘thing’ available is an adulterated ‘thing’. James Phillips suggests that “in his fixation on the thing-in-itself, Kleist seems not to notice that Kant has changed the rules of the game.”²⁰ This would account for the oversight of the redemptive aspect in Kant’s critical philosophy, but it still feels too weighted on the importance of the *noumenal*. Kleist’s concern in this letter articulates a suspicion of the *transcendental* in that one wouldn’t know if it erred, a wistfulness of the loss of the *transcendent* truth of a *noumenal* technicolour world *sans* green glasses. Put simply, the transcendental not as the grounds for experience, but viewed as interference into experience, which puts the prospect of an absolute world of truth into jeopardy.²¹

Truth is of course for Kant, the adherence of the conceptual framework of an object to its empirical counterpart. Kleist is positing an *absolute truth* outside of our “acquisition here”, throwing it over the horizon and lamenting its loss. John Geary suggests that Kleist’s “horror has less to do with Kant... than it does with Kleist and his sense of a world almost bent on destroying whatever man attempts to build.”²² A spectacular defeatism lying in wait to latch itself onto whatever philosophical system would dismantle his ideals completely and justify how the world actually appears to him. What is this world that undoes “whatever man attempts to build”? For Kleist, the transcendent realm of absolute truth is barred, and all that we see is subjectively contaminated.²³

c) The Drama of the Actual

Rather than describe this merely as an issue of ‘world’ (Geary) or apparent pessimism (Zweig), it is my conviction that the investigation of Kleist’s crisis might be made more fruitful through a discussion of modality, and as I’ve stated, particularly the mode of the *actuality*. How should we define actuality? In Kant’s first *Critique*, he outlines three empirical modalities in the

¹⁹ March 22, 1801, to WvZ. P.B Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 95.

²⁰ J. Phillips, *The Equivocation of Reason*, X.

²¹ Note on terminology - The transcendental can be read as ‘grounds of possibility’ in the Kantian sense; the *a priori*. The transcendent as that which oversteps the boundaries of actuality.

²² J. Geary, *Heinrich von Kleist: A Study in Tragedy and Anxiety* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 16.

²³ Stefan Zweig promotes a similar suspicion – “It is as if in some peculiar way, Kleist *wished* to find in Kant the complete negation of all his hopes and beliefs ...” Zweig, *The Struggle with the Daemon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche* (London: Pushkin Press, 2012), 7.

Postulates of Empirical Thinking, which Kant is careful to highlight, do not add anything to the object of experience, but “express only the relation to the faculty of cognition.”²⁴ Despite this, they can still help us organise types of modality in experience –

1. *Whatever agrees with the formal conditions of experience (in accordance with intuition and concepts) is possible.*
2. *That which is connected with the material conditions of experience (of sensation) is actual.*
3. *That whose connection with the actual is determined in accordance with general conditions of experience is (exists) necessarily.*²⁵

Here we see that the *possible* connotes an experientially non-contradictory capacity to arise, even if it can't be proven to exist, the possible doesn't defy the rules of experience (intuition and concept) for it to be so.²⁶ To be however, connected with the 'material' conditions of experience is to be regarded as *actual*, to “obey the rules of relating appearances in terms of the permanence of substance, the nexus of cause and effect, and reciprocal action.”²⁷ In conforming to the intuitive and conceptual rigours underlying experience and spatio-temporal determination, the actual is closely tied with sensibility.²⁸ *Necessity* meets the conditions of the first two absolutely and without fail and cannot be otherwise. It is important that the cognitive edifice be capable of making such distinctions for us to be able to discern what *could be*, *is* and *must be*. Kant in the Third *Critique* tells us that this is particularly so with possibility and actuality, that without the receptivity of the sensibility, the concepts and categories of the understanding would fall into disarray and

²⁴ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A219.

²⁵ Ibid. B266. For further discussion of the role of modality in ensuring against a mismatch between the concepts of the understanding and sensibility in judgements, see Jessica Leech, *Making Modal Distinctions: Kant on the Possible, the Actual and the Intuitive Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 4.

²⁶ Another distinction that Kant makes is that of logical possibility and real possibility. The former is related to the *a priori* concept containing no contradictions, that a thing theoretically could be possible. The latter, real possibility is however concerned with *empirical* possibility and therefore, the possibility of being an object of experience, so possibility here in this context is referring to real possibility and not logical possibility.

²⁷ H. Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 325

²⁸ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, in Kant's copy of the first edition after A218 – “That which is determined in time [is actual].” (E, XC, p.36; 23:32) Also – “That which is determined in time and space is actual...” (E, XCII, p.36;23:32)'. This isn't to say that everything actual must be verified first-hand however - I've never visited Kleist's grave, but my concept of it still stands in all its validity because empirical evidence would support that the grave being there is indeed the case.

muddle, “that is, if our understanding were intuitive, it would have no objects except what is actual.”²⁹ In short, anything we thought, would unquestionably exist, would have spatio-temporal coordinates without needed verification or ‘help’ from our sensibility.³⁰

Despite Kleist’s appeals to reason for an absolute truth “within this life”, it seems he was also acquainted with the *actuality* of life and, whilst I’d hesitate to posit a *causal* relationship, some of Kleist’s backstory would certainly suggest a familiarity with the less-than transcendent aspects of reality, an acquaintance certainly pre-dating the Kant Crisis of 1801.³¹ Indeed, Paul Hamilton in “Managing Kant Crises” makes the suspicious observation that “whether or not he read Kant in detail and with comprehension, the idea of being so disturbed by the philosopher was clearly very important to him.”³² If Kleist knew his way around Kantian philosophy before the 1801 crisis,³³ if he was “already leaning on the door” of this crisis³⁴ and if Kleist was even already plagued by a “daemon”³⁵, it would therefore appear difficult to arrive at the conclusion of Kleist being a passive victim of

²⁹ I. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. Trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 272 (5: 402).

³⁰ “... for everything is actual that stands in one context with a perception in accordance with the laws of the empirical progression (the series of conditions in appearance).’ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A493. The actual is always *synthetic* and in concert with sensibility.

³¹ 1788 - 18th June. Father dies. Kleist is 11. (See David Luke and Nigel Reeves in *Heinrich von Kleist, Das Erdbeben in Chili in The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*. Trans. by David Luke and Nigel Reeves. [London: Penguin Books, 2004], 8). 1793 - 3rd February. Mother dies. Kleist is 16. (See P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 293). 1793 - March. Apparent robber attempts to hijack the carriage in which Kleist is travelling, Kleist describes the incident in his letter to his aunt. (See P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 15). 1800 - August to October. Makes a trip to Würzburg in connection with apparent sexual disorder. Kleist is 33, the purpose of the trip is hard to prove and is subject to debate. Geary describes the trip as mysterious (*Heinrich von Kleist: A Study in Tragedy and Anxiety*, p. xii) whilst Zweig gives a colourful account of Kleist’s apparent sexual disfunction (see S. Zweig, *The Struggle with the Daemon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*, 166-168). Further, to add insult to injury, Kleist suffered a slight stammer. (Ibid.158)

³² P. Hamilton, “Managing Kant Crises”, *SPRACHKUNST – Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 2 (2018): 11, http://dx.doi.org/10.1553/spk49_2s11.

³³ Cassirer reminds us that by 1801 Kleist had “not merely glanced at Kant’s doctrine” but had even “already given it a special place in his ‘Life-plan.’” From the lecture *Heinrich von Kleist und die Kantische Philosophie* given in the Berlin department of the Kant Society on November 15, 1918. <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/31276/pg31276-images.html>. (Many thanks to Howard Caygill for translating).

³⁴ “The *Critique of Pure Reason* did not, as Kleist seems to suggest, break down a door behind which he was innocently standing, rather it opened a door against which he was heavily leaning.” J. Geary, *Heinrich von Kleist: A Study in Tragedy and Anxiety*, 8.

³⁵ “But Kleist could not outrun the daemon, he failed to escape the hunter by burying him beneath tomes and pandects ...” S. Zweig, *The Struggle with the Daemon: Hölderlin, Kleist, Nietzsche*, 181.

the *Kantische Philosophie*. Rather, Kleist found in Kant an opportunity to collapse with legitimate grounds, Kant was posited as the grounds of possibility for a Kleistian melodrama of breakdown, one that gave voice to the often vexing and frustrating dealings with the actual world completely incongruent with the lofty promises of enlightenment reason.³⁶

Kleist didn't really need transcendental philosophy to point out a disparity between the two realms he seemed to vacillate between, a position of grim actuality and transcendent fancy driven by the promises of reason. Even in a letter to Wilhelmine von Zenge in 1800 (the year before the 'crisis') where Kleist extols his pursuit of knowledge towards the absolute, he seems to be grasping at the heavens to bring it down within the liveability of an *actual* home, an *actual* life – "We must not confine ourselves to mere dreaming only. It is a reality when I imagine the amiable valley that will one day enclose our cottage, and *me* and *you* and my pursuit of *knowledge* in this cottage, and nothing else... I feel that nothing can make me happy except the fulfilment of this desire... But Reason must have a voice in it as well."³⁷ A sense, then, already of disparity in the absolute knowledge that requires 'pursuit', a sense of trying to bridge together two incongruent worlds. Unfortunately, the voice of reason imagined as the bridge between these worlds (as Kant showed) is of roughshod and undependable construction, but Kant *neither created the gulf nor torched the bridge*, the gulf Kleist observes and *lives*, clearly predates the 'crisis' of 1801.

³⁶ P.B Miller helps us situate this incongruity – "Kleist's generation already felt the more worldly failures of the Enlightenment program. If religion was mere superstition, as the Enlightenment had tended to think, then its own rationalistic optimism now seemed equally baseless. The post – Revolutionary turmoil and Terror in 'enlightened' France, and the prospect of a war in Europe on a scale unknown for more than a century, hardly seemed to Kleist's generation evidence of mankind's progress toward perfection." P.B Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 4. Compare this to the pre-critical Kant (to keep with our 'accused') in 1784 – "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity." In this essay, Kant famously aligns enlightenment with freedom, specifically a greater civic freedom "the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters." Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* <https://users.manchester.edu/Facstaff/SSNaragon/Online/texts/318/Kant,%20Enlightenment.pdf>

In this light, there almost seems a certain portentous flavour to Kant's later reservations concerning reason in his A preface of the *Critique* in 1781 where he describes metaphysics as "a battlefield." I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A viii.

³⁷ November 13, 1800, to WvZ. P.B Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 72.

2. Paradise Through the Wrong Door in *Das Erdbeben in Chili*

The male had on a brown cloth frock coat, a white batiste muslin vest, gray cloth trousers, soft boots with rounded toes, his face bloodstained around the mouth, but only slightly.

Court Officer Felgentrev³⁸

a) Modulations in the Actual

As we have seen, Kant for Kleist becomes the apotheosis of an incongruity of idealised striving towards transcendence against a disappointingly finite actuality. The task now begins of mapping the modulations of this tale as they relate to the mode of actuality (that is the modulations within a mode). We see these modulations play out spectacularly in Kleist's tale *Das Erdbeben in Chili* (1806) which is based on the actual earthquake in Santiago, Chile in 1647 but still contains the sense of thwarting allegory we can expect from Kleist. The metaphor of the mirror will be introduced here, as an agent of distortion, not just reflection. This evocation of reflection / distortion is imported from Kleist's metaphor of the concave mirror in *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810) – “just as two intersecting lines, converging on one side of a point, reappear on the other after their passage through infinity ... just as our image, as we approach a concave mirror, vanishes to infinity only to reappear before our very eyes.”³⁹ Keeping the metaphor of the concave mirror as a backdrop, an explication of the plot will unfold simultaneously with analysis.⁴⁰



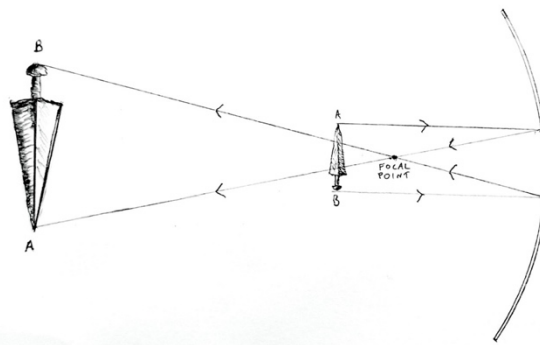
The tale begins with both main characters, Jerónimo and Josefa awaiting their execution for a tryst in the garden of a convent. Their

³⁸ From the official report of the court officer Felgentrev, justice in Heinersdorf, November 22 and December 2, 1811, and an eyewitness account. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 208.

³⁹ H.v. Kleist, “Über Das Marionettentheatre”. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 216.

⁴⁰ In Walter Benjamin's essay “Goethe's *Elective Affinities*”, he makes the distinction between the ‘truth content’ of a work, which criticism aims to uncover and the ‘material content’ which commentary unfolds: “the truth content always remains ... hidden as the material content comes to the fore.” Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 297. The material content can have many forms (style, language used, technique etc.) which of course have particular historical determinability, the truth content is rather the immortal content of the work that not even the one who produces the work may have access to whilst utilising the material content. In the criticism of a text, we must go through the material content in seeking the truth content, and in this respect, I will try to honour the interplay of the two.

indiscretion becomes apparent with the birth pangs of their child, Filipe on the day of Corpus Christi, on the steps into the cathedral. “Suddenly, with a crash as if the very firmament had shattered, the greater part of the city collapsed, burying every



living thing beneath its ruins.”⁴¹ And with this, the lovers are freed from their condemnation. The purely contingent erupts here not *just* in the spirit of reminding us of man’s terror at being reduced to “a plaything of Chance, a puppet on the string of fate...”⁴² but also as the grounds for a *Kleistian flip*, a catalyst for abrupt, *seismic* change. The irrationality of the earthquake here assumes the role of the vanishing point in the concave mirror metaphor, intervening to move the plot to the inverted place which follows in which the characters must attempt a reasoning of this lack of reckoning and of the caprices of actuality, leaving them trying to account for such a profound *inversion* of fortune.⁴³

After being spat out by the vanishing point, the two lovers and their son Felipe (whom Josefa recovers whilst also escaping her condemnation via the earthquake) reconvene outside the city in the surrounding woodlands. The reader will notice at this point in the tale the sensorially rich descriptions of these woodlands – “the loveliest of nights had fallen, wonderfully mild and

⁴¹ H.v. Kleist, “Das Erdbeben in Chili”, *The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*, Trans. by David Luke and Nigel Reeves (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 52.

⁴² Letter of May 1799 to UvK. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 28. In which Heinrich details how unimaginable it is for him to live a life girded by fate.

⁴³ We are reminded of Kant’s three essays on earthquakes, their causes and use. *On the Causes of Earthquakes on the Occasion of the Calamity that befell the Western Countries of Europe Towards the End of Last Year* (1756), *History and Natural Description of the Most Noteworthy Occurrences of the Earthquake That Struck a Large Part of the Earth at the End of the Year 1755* (1756), and *Magister Immanuel Kant’s Continued Observations on the Earthquakes that have been Experienced for some Time* (1756). Kant, hypothesising around the causes for such disasters is appealing to reason instead of succumbing to the theological histrionics the wake of such disasters. Discussions of this telluric activity (in Kant inadvertently but in Kleist overtly) force us to question whether reason can promise security and consistency against the very actual threat of an eruption of contingency. Kant’s efforts to rally man’s ingenuity only show us the scale of the danger, a danger within the actual which Kleist’s characters’ lives are redirected by, yet catastrophically overlook.

fragrant, silvery and still, a night such as only a poet might dream of.”⁴⁴ Is this still the world that Josefa and Jerónimo were condemned so harshly in? This world oversaturated with unremitting, saccharine loveliness that Kleist brings out over-intensifies this section in the direction of the transcendent. When Jerónimo, Josefa and their little Felipe come across another party of refugees from the earthquake – fearing the enduring judgement of these folks who Josefa remembers as “of excellent character”⁴⁵ – Josefa is plunged into embarrassment when Don Fernando asks Josefa if his child, Juan could feed at her breast due to the child’s mother, Elvira being injured. Josefa and Jeronimo are dumbstruck to find that they are welcomed by the party, and the affection from said party is only heightened once Josefa agrees to feed hungry little Juan. “Josefa felt as if she were in the land of the blessed”⁴⁶ and to Josefa, it seemed of this party that “their memories seemed not to reach back beyond the disaster.”⁴⁷ A calamity-induced *tabula rasa*.

Despite this loveliness, we must remember though, that the concave mirror is still producing the same object that is reflected.⁴⁸ Despite this modal ambiguity, the reader can be sure that the two lovers and their Filipe have not breached the walls of Eden.⁴⁹ This surety rests on the personification of a taint in the concave mirror, a taint betraying the illusory qualities of the mirror, preventing us from flying too far into the oneiric. Kleist is sure to place a character in this blessed land who shows a sort of knowing discomfort at the situation, Doña Isabel, Don Fernando’s sister-in-law, despite the general cordiality of the group “let her gaze rest pensively from time to time upon Josefa.”⁵⁰ This subtle but explosive puncturing of the utopic balloon is anchored in the realisation that as someone who was offered a place at Josefa’s execution and refused it, Doña Isabel *remembers* their transgression, here memory has survived the flip and denies us belief in the transcendence from their condemnation. Doña Isabel reminds us of the continuity of time inherent in determining actuality.⁵¹

⁴⁴ H.v. Kleist, “Das Erdbeben in Chili”, *The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*, 57.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 58.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 59.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ That is, of course, after our brain has corrected the inverted image sent to it from the retina.

⁴⁹ Indeed, Elystan Griffiths tells us that “Kleist’s fictions generally demonstrate the idyll to be precarious, not only because of external pressures, but also because of the structures and mindsets that human beings carry with them into the idyll.” *The Shepherd, the Volk, and the Middle Class: Transformations of Pastoral in German-Language Writing, 1750-1850* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2020), 151.

⁵⁰ H.v. Kleist, “Das Erdbeben in Chili”, *The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*, 59.

⁵¹ See footnote 29.

Doña Isabel reminds us that for Kleist, there is no escaping the actual, the sense of ‘too good to be true’ here hovers constantly in uncertainty, the taint constantly drawing the eye away from the illusory promises of the mirror. Even though utopic aspirations for humankind seem to have become manifest after the disaster – “the human spirit itself seemed to unfold like the fairest of flowers.”⁵² – The uneasiness of Doña Isabel provides us with a boundary or limit to our optimism, the eye can’t focus entirely on the illusion of the mirror *or* the taint and we find ourselves stretched between the two poles of transcendence and actuality – the illusion within or *beyond* the mirror and the flawed surface.

b) Condemnation (A Reprise)

The end begins – the party hears of a mass being performed at the one church that survived the earthquake, the Dominican cathedral. This cathedral becomes the site of a spectacular crash back into Kleist’s un-inverted actuality of the world, an arena of conflict and disparity. Josefa leaps at the opportunity to attend the congregation and, “rising at once enthusiastically to her feet, declare(s) that she ha(s) never felt a stronger impulse to cast herself down before her Maker than at this very time.”⁵³ It is again, Doña Isabel who seems to be the one in the know⁵⁴ in terms of what the lofty decision Josefa makes means in actuality. Doña Isabel seems to have a strange “unhappy foreboding”⁵⁵ but her protests fail and the party (minus Doña Isabel, Don Pedro and Doña Elvira, the latter two of which are still too injured to make the journey) attend the cathedral.



Here we see the denouement Kleist has been building towards starting to take shape, a deferred and heavenly wrath reasserting itself against what seemed like God’s favour in the previous section, a friction like the tectonic plates grinding in the earthquake. The reality of the incongruency of lofty ideals and actuality come to the fore once more and a sacrifice must be made to atone for the slippage that afforded this apparent glimpse of paradise,

⁵² Ibid. 60.

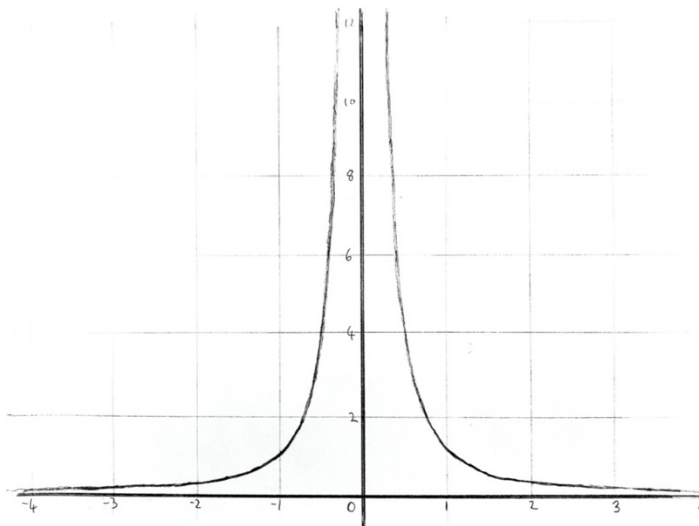
⁵³ Ibid. 61.

⁵⁴ For the role of women in Kleist as the ones in the know, see Leonard G. Schulze, “Alkamene’s Ominous ‘Ach!’ On Bastards, Beautiful Souls and the Spirit in Heinrich von Kleist”, *Studies in Romanticism* 19/2 (1980): 249-266.

⁵⁵ H.v. Kleist, “Das Erdbeben in Chili”, *The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*, 62.

however fleeting. Who would trigger this quasi-lapsarian fall for the lovers? Who else but a cleric, the mouthpiece of divine law who details the lovers' transgressions to the assembled mass of pious devotees. In an "earthquake of rhetoric"⁵⁶ this cleric precipitates what he and his congregation would call divine retribution but, in *actuality*, cajoles and rallies the crowd into bloodthirsty slaughter. Kleist makes sure that we're aware of this modal dualism in the escalating situation having Don Fernando call the increasingly furious mob "murderous villains."⁵⁷ The modulated actuality of paradise is revealed (by the very vessel of divine / transcendent word) as cohabiting the same modal dwelling as the nadir of human nature. Josefa, Jerónimo and Don Fernando's baby are slaughtered by the mob.

c) The Monstrous Actual



The monstrous actual where we end up is the actual we left, only escalated through a misreading of the concave mirror. Escalation can of course give the impression of sharing a similar trajectory to ascendance, an increase, a build-up, a movement *upwards*, towards the

heavens - ascendance until transcendence. Kleist shows us the true outcome of relentless escalation however, the result of this incredible but doomed *Salto Mortale* Josefa and Jerónimo make is a leap which always misses the absolute truth it aims for, merely *inflaming* everything in the vicinity. By once again hijacking *Das Marionettentheater*⁵⁸, we can introduce the geometric entity of

⁵⁶ E. Wiggins "Kleist's Four Causes: Narration and Etiology in 'Das Erdbeben in Chili'", 597.

⁵⁷ H.v. Kleist, "Das Erdbeben in Chili", *The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*, 65.

⁵⁸ This same effect of a missed grace is utilised by T. Mehigan to suggest a precursor to Nietzsche's posthumanism. Perhaps a more optimistic reading than mine. See T. Mehigan, "Posthumanist Thinking in the Work of Heinrich von Kleist", *Posthumanism in the Age of Humanism: Mind, Matter, and the Life Sciences after Kant*. Eds. Edgar Landgraf, Gabriel Trop, and Leif Weatherby (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 206.

the ‘asymptote’⁵⁹ to highlight this missed truth. In this essay Kleist describes the movement of the puppets in their relation to the puppeteer, against the precise relation – “of numbers to their logarithms or *asymptotes* to their *hyperbola*.”⁶⁰ Following this example we could read the asymptote (vertical line) in the diagram as a grace impossible in consciousness (or the paradisaical realm Kleist seems to describe earlier). Reaching towards the impossible, *escalating*, the two rationally derived hyperbola (curved lines in the diagram) try to close the gap, but the promise of consummation is deferred to *infinity*. That is, to make the leap to the asymptote, an *irrational* value or ‘surd’⁶¹ must be introduced, such an irrationally derived tectonic intervention cannot however, be maintained.

We see how in this model, Jerónimo and Josefa, with all their reasoning of the crisis always grasping for the asymptotic; of God’s plan, overlook the fact that their glimpse of paradise was pure contingency, an irrational emergence without divine rationale. Viewed without providence, the earthquake is a result of tectonics, the priest is just a man in robes, the initial survival of Josefa and Jerónimo luck, the church they die in just a building etc. In short, we get a glimpse of paradise but only through a wrong door – Kleist’s characters mistaking telluric activity and other survivors’ will to band together to survive in the actual as divine intervention in the modality of transcendent necessity, causing an *inflammation*, an escalation in the actual through misrecognition. Kleist seems to give us a cautionary tale in which we don’t reach the asymptote; but we erroneously reason that we have through the introduction of the surd to our hyperbola, of overlooking the taint marking the surface of the mirror. A deception which, as we saw in the first section, has clear export for Kleist whose ideals were just the play of light from the activities of reason he thought could promise salvation. Why didn’t we pay closer attention to Doña Isabel?

Yet of course, the tale hasn’t *quite* ended... Don Fernando and Doña Elvira adopt Josefa and Jerónimo’s child, Felipe. Kleist tells us that “when

⁵⁹ “An asymptote ...—most often a straight line—that another curve ‘doesn’t fall together with.’ In other words, the second curve ‘runs alongside’ its asymptote, getting closer to it but never hitting it.” Steven Schwartzman in *The Words of Mathematics - An Etymological Dictionary of Mathematical Terms used in English* (Washington, D.C.: The Mathematical Association of America, 1994), 30.

⁶⁰ H.v. Kleist, “Über Das Marionettentheatre”. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 212 (emphasis by author).

⁶¹ “Surd ...from Latin *surdus* ‘deaf.’ ... Why should expressions like those be called ‘deaf’? The explanation begins with the Greek word *alogos*, a compound of *a-* ‘not’ and *logos* ‘ratio, reason.’ (The Greek term was later literally translated into Latin, giving *irrational*.’ S. Schwartzman, *The Words of Mathematics - An Etymological Dictionary of Mathematical Terms used in English*, 214. Deaf to the voice of reason perhaps?

Don Fernando compared Felipe with Juan and the ways in which he had acquired the two of them, it almost seemed to him that he had reason to feel glad.”⁶² This is the final Kleistian flip of the tale, once again we’re moving in the direction of transcendent folly; that the death of Don Fernando’s *own child* could be healed, by a substitute child, just because that child was ‘acquired’ through sacrifice in a church; seems dangerously like providential thinking...

3. *Penthesilea* and the Theatre of War

The mouth was shut tightly, with both sets of teeth undamaged, and the tongue as well, and the jawbones could be separated only by the greatest effort with an iron lever, so that the gorge might be examined, wherein we could detect no further signs of the shot, but in the backmost part of the velum palatinum behind the uvula, a small roughness and depression of the bone could be felt with a finger where a one-third-ounce piece of lead had impacted.

Court Officer Felgentrev ⁶³

a) Thwarted Perspectives and Teichoscopy

In the previous section we saw the modulations of conflict within the actual and the deceptive shapes this can take. From the cathedral to the forest, the threat of violence always looms in the actual for Kleist. The actual is a battleground and *Penthesilea* captures this spectacularly.⁶⁴ The play of course hinges on the doomed love affair that blossoms between Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons and Achilles, the hero of the Greeks. Yet there is also a battleground within Penthesilea herself; in this respect she vacillates violently between flights of pure fancy and *gory* actuality based around her inner conflict between ‘Tanais’ Law’ (the ancient decree stating that she can only possess the love of a man whom she defeats in battle) and her actual, unearned love for Achilles. Before we address this friction fully however, we



⁶² H.v. Kleist, “Das Erdbeben in Chili” in *The Marquis of O- and Other Stories*, 67.

⁶³ From Kleist’s autopsy report. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 208.

⁶⁴ Kleist, as a retired Junker knew the idiosyncrasies of battle better than most. Kleist laments his “seven years lost to soldiery” in his letter of 1799 to UvK. Ibid. 27.

will initially examine the effect teichoscopy has on a reading of actuality in Kleist's *Penthesilea*, mapping out a route through the key scenes of the *over there* and onwards towards the climax of the play.

Patrice Pavis in her *Dictionary of the Theatre* describes Teichoscopy as “avoid[ing] having to show violent or unseemly actions on stage” but goes on to tell us that whilst sidestepping such offending issues, teichoscopy also “giv[es] the spectators the *illusion* that they are actually happening...”⁶⁵ It is a means for Kleist to suggest that the action is happening *right now*, whilst simultaneously being *over there*. The *over there* seems to be at odds with throwing us into the actuality of a play about war, but if we explore some of the key scenes utilising teichoscopy and bearing in mind the trajectory of the escalating love and violence between the two main characters, we see a play of conflicts with spectacular movement, that uses these spatio-temporal considerations to give a sense of mobility between the poles of the transcendent and actual, highlighting them more explicitly.

In act three we see a description of Achilles and his chariot attempting to evade Penthesilea –

*MYRMIDON: Oh, how he leans far out
Over their flying backs and urges them!
And they at the sound – immortal coursers! – they
Devour in thund’ring flight the fleeting ground.
Their throats’ hot vapour, streaming out behind,
Seems, by the god of life, to draw the car!
The stag before the hounds is not more swift!
Sight cannot penetrate the whirling wheels
Whose spokes all mingle in a solid disc.’*

...

*CAPTAIN: And does she gain?
A DOLOPIAN: She gains!
MYRMIDON: But not yet near!
DOLOPIAN: She gains! She gains! With ev’ry thund’ring hoofbeat
She swallows down some of the space
That still divides her from great Peleus’ son –
MYRMIDON: O all ye gods! Protecting deities!
Look! Now she is almost as large as he!*⁶⁶

⁶⁵ “From the Greek *teichoskopia*, seeing through the wall.” Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. The Routledge Dictionary of Performance and Contemporary Theatre, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Routledge, 2016), 381.

⁶⁶ H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea” in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 178 – 179.

In this act we ‘see’ Penthesilea in blistering chariot pursuit of the hero of the Greeks. Noticing the deific descriptions of Achilles a few lines earlier in which he seems to be described in metaphoric sun-like fashion and the above description of the inhuman manoeuvre in which he escapes, it is easy to fall into the transcendent reading of this demi-god warrior, further reinforced by him being literally introduced as *over there, beyond*.⁶⁷ Penthesilea not only closes in on Achilles but us too, “she swallows down some of the space.”⁶⁸ Penthesilea begins what will be the overarching movement of the play, of driving Achilles from his ideality into the disappointing actuality of humanity, indeed in the very next scene (four), our first instance of Achilles onstage shows him as irritable and injured. We could read this as similar to the flipping in *Das Erdbeben* but this instance is a little different – instead of a conflict of world and ideal, what we see here is a cleaving down the middle of an individual character and an actuality playing catch up following the scenes of transcendent battle. This first interaction of the two on the battlefield punctures the balloon of the Homeric Achilles of Greek mythology; we can see the nascency of a dual movement in just this first meeting: that the closer Penthesilea gets to Achilles the less ideal he becomes.⁶⁹

Here our messengers describe the second meeting of Penthesilea and Achilles upon the battlefield in scene seven, this time from the Amazon camp

—
FIRST GIRL (on the hill):
Yes there she is! The whole field now is clear.
FIRST PRIESTESS: Where can you see her?
GIRL: Leading all the host.
See how she dances forth to meet him, all
Flashing in golden armor, breathing war!
 ...

GIRLS (on the hill): Oh, see! Oh, now they meet!
Ye gods! Let not Earth shudder at the shock!
Now, even now, even as I speak, they crash
*Together like two hurtling stars in heav'n!*⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “Before Achilles enters the stage for the first time, his image is visually constructed out of its body parts as they become visible, one by one from the top down, when he comes up like the rising sun from behind a hill.” H.C. Seeba, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 117.

⁶⁸ H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea” in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 179.

⁶⁹ Escalation / deflation. As the actual escalates around them, the two characters become drained of anything that would mark them as anything more than demonstrably human.

⁷⁰ H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea” in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 199 -200.

This encounter describes the fateful instance where the two clash again, this time, however, they literally collide; Achilles' spear 'splitting' Penthesilea's breast. Such dramatic poetry of the *over there*. The girls on the hill conjuring metaphors of the cosmos to describe the clash of these two titans. Yet once again, after the following act wherein an officer describes the fall of Penthesilea in more detail, scene nine has Penthesilea enter 'supported by Prothoe and Meroe', and, in a 'feeble'⁷¹ voice ranting and raving about killing Achilles but also proclaiming her love for him. Again, Kleist gives us the teichoscopic rendering of the battle, just to have one of the belligerents appear, having closed the space of the *over there* to get to us, limping like a wounded bird and bereft of her senses. A victim of both the wound in her breast but also, the cleaving of her emotional unity, torn asunder by the warring *nomos* of Amazonian law and the *eros* of her fiery passions.

b) The Bleeding Actual

Achilles and Penthesilea's final clash on the battlefield occurs after Penthesilea learns that it was Achilles whose spear dropped her in the previous clash and not vice versa as Prothoe's subterfuge had led her to believe. Penthesilea is 'beside herself' and 'half mad' with shame and grief and, upon receiving a message that Achilles challenges her once more on the battlefield, enthusiastically re-enters the arena of conflict. Achilles thinks that she is so smitten with him that she won't harm him, that he can feign his defeat to Penthesilea and in this way, he can have her. His bloody error is relayed in the third teichoscopic account of a more fatal clash⁷² on the remote battlefield of the hinterland in scene twenty-two –

HIGH PRIESTESS: You maidens, who will bring me news?

SECOND PRIESTESS: Terpé! Quick! Tell us what you see from yonder hill?

AN AMAZON: (*who has mounted the hill, horror-struck*): You grim and ghastly gods of nether hell! Be witness to my words – Oh fearful spectacle!

HIGH PRIESTESS: How now! How now! Has she beheld Medusa?

PRIESTESS: What do you see? Speak! Speak!

AMAZON: Penthesilea –

Grovelling she couches by her grizzly hounds,

⁷¹ Ibid. 202.

⁷² This clash is interestingly characterised as more of a 'hunt' on the part of Penthesilea by Grazia Pulvirenti and Renata Gambino. See "Hounds, Horses and Elephants in Heinrich von Kleist's Drama Penthesilea", *Animals and Humans in German Literature, 1800 – 2000: Exploring the Great Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020), 7.

She whom a woman's womb did bear, and rends –
 His limbs she rends and mangles to shreds!
 HIGH PRIESTESS: Oh horror! Horror!

ALL: Deed unspeakable!

AMAZON: See where it comes, bleached o'er with death's own hue,
 The word that solves for us the gruesome riddle.

*(She descends from the hill.)*⁷³

Achilles is shot through the throat with Penthesilea's arrow. This instance, whilst still maintaining the teichoscopic splitting, functions slightly differently than the two previous; the remote as well as the intimate actual action depicted is base, unheroic both from Achilles, who "flees in horror,... flees, like a young roe"⁷⁴ and Penthesilea who chews on Achilles' shoulder like one of her dogs.⁷⁵ This time, when a shellshocked Penthesilea reappears on the stage in scene twenty-four along with Achilles' corpse which is covered by a red pall, we see only the escalated form of a horrible actuality of the two character's incompatible forms of love. These three encounters of Penthesilea and Achilles culminate in the actual consequences of their mistaken beliefs; for Penthesilea - believing that Achilles is a deity she can tame through Tanais' law, the concomitant fault of belief in a transcendent being and an absolute law and, for Achilles – believing in his *own* status as transcendent warrior, overestimating his ability to overcome Penthesilea's furious faith in absolute law. Indeed, in scene twenty-two, Kleist changes up the ongoing theme of the remote ideal and the intimate actual by *infecting* the remote ideal with the baseness of humanity, it bleeds into the ideal-far and dramatically spills onto the intimacy of the stage, as red as Achilles' pall.⁷⁶ In *Penthesilea* we see war as described by a poet versus war with all its leaking baggage, of very human errors.

⁷³ Ibid. 252.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 253.

⁷⁵ "Penthesilea proceeds to do that which even Homer's terrible Achilles was incapable: joining the mastiffs, she sinks her teeth into the rent flesh of Achilles." Linda Hoff-Purviance, "The Form of Kleist's Penthesilea and the Iliad", *The German Quarterly* 55/1 (1982): 43.

⁷⁶ We are reminded of Kant's advocacy for the proper determination between faculties in his *Inaugural Dissertation*, where he warns against the "*infection between sensuous and intellectual cognition*", I. Kant, *Kant's Inaugural Dissertation of 1770*, trans. by William J. Eckoff (New York: Columbia College, 1894), 75. Perhaps reminiscent of the way that, for Kleist, Kant's transcendental philosophy appeared to bleed into actuality, barring transcendent truth.



Seán Allan tells us that “Penthesilea’s predicament is largely brought about by her failure to distinguish between the real-life Achilles and the wish fulfilling image of him that exists in her imagination.”⁷⁷ Indeed, this misrecognition is the archetype of all of the errors within the play (and one we recognise from *Das Erdbeben*), whether it be this misrecognition of Achilles’ deific status by Penthesilea, of her taking Tanais’s Law as absolute or even Achilles himself believing in his own invincibility, his own *necessity*: the modal muddle reigns once more. The way however, Allan reads this as *Penthesilea* suggesting that if “human beings would renounce their fruitless quest for monolithic certainty and stop regarding their contingent man-made conventions as infallible truths” that human beings “would avoid many of the crippling and potentially catastrophic disappointments in life which they are repeatedly beset”⁷⁸ only touches on half of the problem. Penthesilea continues loving Achilles even after Achilles’ ideality becomes more and more transparent. The errors in *Penthesilea* are unavoidable in flawed creatures such as you and I and Kleist knew it. We fall in love with those who don’t reciprocate, we fall for lies, even ones we tell ourselves. This is the bind we see over and over in Kleist’s works and particularly in *Penthesilea*, to which Kleist ascribed personal importance.⁷⁹ What Kleist shows us is the error which all of his characters make, is an error inherent in the actuality of being human, of which reason is implicated.

⁷⁷ Séan Allan, *The Plays of Heinrich von Kleist: Ideals and illusions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 162.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 177. Allan (Ibid.45) does note that Kleist draws a distinction between the pursuit of ‘realisable’ ideals and non-realizable ‘transcendent’ ideals but how could one know with any certainty which were which when Kleist shows us that actuality is so *slippery*?

⁷⁹ Kleist to Marie von Kleist (his cousin), Dresden, Late Autumn, 1807 – “Indescribably moving, all that you write about *Penthesilea*. It is true, my deepest nature is there, and you have caught it like a seeress: all the filth and radiance of my soul together.” P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 175. It’s worth noting also that Kleist wrote *Penthesilea* in a French jail cell after being suspected of spying. Thwarted by ‘fate’ once more.

c) Escalation of Error: Love and Absolute War

In Carl von Clausewitz's seminal work *On War* he frequently conjures the division between theoretical or *ideal* war, something calculated in terms of logical considerations only and *actual* war, in which war is consistently beset by the thwarting proclivities of contingency and the unquantifiable aspects of humanity. In military strategy, one must keep in mind that "the art of war deals with living and with moral forces. ... it must always leave a margin for uncertainty."⁸⁰ In the real theatre of war, people can have myriad motivations and complexities which may interfere with the overarching strategy, not to mention that they make errors... This dichotomy between ideal and actual is clearly used by Clausewitz in the interest of guiding commanders to take issues of practical as well as theoretical import seriously in war, and to calculate probabilities for unintended outcomes.



When, however, Clausewitz says that "every fault and exaggeration of the theory is instantly exposed in war,"⁸¹ he could, to give one example, easily be describing Penthesilea's rote adherence to Tanais' Law, a 'fault' which doesn't account for the very *actual* likelihood of genuinely falling in love. Here Penthesilea's prophecy bequeathed by her mother (that she will crown Achilles with a garland) "proves literally true but actually false."⁸² Achilles certainly gets his garland.⁸³ Where does all this

escalation lead us? In scene twenty-four, the warrior, inflamed to apparent madness in her quest to satisfy both Tanais' Law and her own unbridled and very *human* passions, fully encounters the gravitas of her actions. Achilles is dead. She is forced to face this when presented



⁸⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27.

⁸¹ Ibid. 66.

⁸² J. Geary, *Heinrich von Kleist: A Study in Tragedy and Anxiety*, 15. That is *theoretically* true, *actually* false using Clausewitz's distinction.

⁸³ As Penthesilea observes in the final scene – "Ah, all these bleeding roses! Ah, this red wreath of gashes round his head." H.v. Kleist, "Penthesilea" in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 263. The transcendent object of desire is once again missed, leaving only the actuality of the bloody consequences.

with the marker of the utmost actuality⁸⁴ of the play's conflict, the dead body of Achilles. Not just dead but mutilated by her own hand / teeth. Penthesilea in her grief renounces Tanais's Law and produces a dagger within herself of *pure feeling* –

*PENTHESILEA: For now I will step down into my breast
As into a mine and there will dig a lump
Of cold ore, an emotion that will kill.
This ore I temper in the fires of woe
To hardest steel: then steep it through and through
In the hot, biting venom of remorse;
Carry it then to Hope's eternal anvil
And sharpen it and point it to a dagger;
Now to this dagger do I give my breast:
So!So!So!So! Once more! Now, it is good.*⁸⁵

Penthesilea is dead.

Later in *On War*, Clausewitz introduces the concept of 'absolute war.' Due to Clausewitz's shifting terminology during the process of writing it is often misinterpreted⁸⁶ – he seems to use 'absolute war' in terms of the highest possible point of theoretical escalation which informs (and thus applies to) actual war, absolute war is a *threat*. "Theory" he tells us, "has the duty to give priority to the absolute form of war and to make that form a general point of reference, so that he who wants to learn from theory becomes accustomed to

⁸⁴ I am thinking here of Martin Heidegger's 'ownmost' – "Thus death reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped.*" Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Eastford CT: Martino Fine Books, 2019), 294. Death as the ever-present possibility of no further possibilities.

⁸⁵ H.v. Kleist, "Penthesilea" in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 275. Penthesilea's suicide seems (in its almost magical construction) to give an instance of the world which Kant warned us about in section one of this piece, that is, "if our understanding were intuitive, it would have no objects except what is actual." I.Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 5:402.

⁸⁶ In *Clausewitz's Categories of War* by Christopher Bassford, he admits to us that "many people (including myself) have assumed that ideal war is a synonym for absolute war. In Book 1, however, Clausewitz eliminated the ambiguity of 'absolute war' and set up a clear distinction between the pure abstraction of 'ideal war' on the one hand, driven to unachievable extremes outside the boundaries of time, space, and man's political nature, and war in practical reality on the other... ideal war is an exercise in pure logic, serving to demonstrate the dangers of rigid logic in the human social universe and forcing the discussion to return to the practical domain of politics... The dialectical opposite of 'ideal war' is 'real war,' which now returns to its literal meaning encompassing war as it actually occurs, in all of its variety." Christopher Bassford, "Clausewitz's Categories of War", (2002), <https://www.clausewitzstudies.org/bibl/Bassford-ClausewitzsCategoriesOfWar.pdf>

keeping that point in view constantly, to measuring all his hopes and fears by it.”⁸⁷ It is as Howard Caygill tells us, that for Clausewitz, “the real problem is managing the violence of the absolute, what he calls ‘absolute war’ or the enormous capacity for violence.”⁸⁸ War at its utmost is an ever-present threat in the actual that cannot be planned for or eradicated from the horizon, we can only hope for de-escalation. *Penthesilea* takes us to a point of such escalation that there is only error and death with no resolution: “a logic tending to mutual destruction”⁸⁹ in Caygill’s words.

These Clausewitzian warnings of the absolute bear a striking resemblance to what we know of Kant’s project. Indeed, it is exactly as Caygill reminds us, that “Kant warned against the consequences of moving from appearances to the world of absolutes such as God, the World and the Soul, while recognizing that it was in the nature of human reason to make this passage, and to suffer the consequences – error, oppression and even madness.”⁹⁰ Reason oversteps itself consistently and cannot always be trusted – Kant tells us of the dialectical vagaries of reason, that “they are sophistries ... of pure reason itself, and even the wisest of all human beings cannot get free of them; perhaps after much effort he may guard himself from error. But he can never be wholly rid of the illusion, which ceaselessly teases and mocks him.”⁹¹ As the faculty of restlessly ascending to the unconditioned, reason must be tempered and its voice vetted. It is *almost* as Allan said, that we must be wary of labelling manmade constructions as transcendent prescriptions, but this alone doesn’t protect us, the actual is a battlefield where illusions spring up constantly and chaos reigns, on which we can die at any moment or even fall for the enemy.

We must maintain a balance and keep watch over the actuality of our finite affairs, lest they get out of hand. *Penthesilea*, apparently hoping to obfuscate the grim facts, desperately tries to minimise her butchery – “it was a slip – believe me! – the wrong word.”⁹² This is not as outlandish as it first appears, the overlooking of actual escalation here is the point. In his essay *Über die Allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden*, Kleist ruminates on the way Mirabeau couldn’t have prepared his words to the King of France’s master of ceremonies but had to be in the actuality of the moment, subject

⁸⁷ C.v. Clausewitz, *On War*, 225.

⁸⁸ H. Caygill, “Thus Spoke Zapata”, (2012), 21.
https://www.radicalphilosophyarchive.com/issue-files/rp171_article1_caygill_alsosprachzapata.pdf

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B397.

⁹² H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea” in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 266.

to all its minutiae for his famous words to appear to him. “Perhaps, after all, it was only the twitch of an upper lip, or an ambiguous fingering of a wrist frill, that precipitated the overthrow of the old order in France.”⁹³ Similarly, Penthesilea, in reducing her butchery to a slip of the tongue, conjures a long ramp of escalation with the horror of ‘absolute war’ at the zenith and something as easily overlooked as a ‘wrong word’ at the foot. But even more horrifying: Kleist shows us the universality of this risk for all rational beings, that his monstrous vision of the *actual* is the unavoidable risk of our reason which ceaselessly ascends towards the absolute.

4. Conclusion (Death on the Wannsee)

Here we return to where we started, the end; death, which seems to be the only outcome for transcendent folly for Kleist. We have seen the ‘Kant crisis’ which became an emblem of sorts, put into the service of an ongoing battle in Kleist, of attempting to actualise the transcendent, trying to live the absolute, which was a friction building before the apparent ‘crisis’. That Kleist shattered himself upon the dualistic Kantian phenomenal / noumenal split, only articulated the existing split within himself, a mistaken modal vacillation between the apparent necessity of absolutes and the contingent actuality he was forced to live. Here was a dialectic without resolution, the escalation towards absolute war within Kleist which, as we know, eventually hit the utmost of its potentiality. We must not read Kleist as a thinker whom Kant suddenly induced into crisis – as if the first *critique* were some demonic instrument of self-destruction – no, we must acknowledge that Kleist clearly came to it with this war already raging in his heart.

(*Thunder*)⁹⁴

What Kleist’s reading of Kant offers however is problematising just how safe the hard-won safety of the first *Critique* – which Kant secures for us through his guide to the proper use of reason – really is. Tim Mehigan tells us that “if Kant’s project was the insight that reason functions best when its limits are properly understood, Kleist’s was to point out the limits of these limits when applied to life situations.”⁹⁵ We can take this even further than the rhetoric of limits however – that even if an axiomatic and rigorously logical rendering

⁹³ H.v. Kleist, “Über die Allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden”. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*. 220.

⁹⁴ From stage directions in, H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea” in *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 244.

⁹⁵ T. Mehigan, *Writing after Kant*, 183.

of the borders of reason's legitimacy stop us flying off into the absolute, the ground we depart from is not safe either. If Kant's project departs from the grounds of what already must be, what is 'given' (the realm of experience, the *actuality* of empirical data in synthesis with concepts), Kleist, whilst seemingly departing from the same place problematises this very given as precarious and forever ready to erupt into conflict or contingency.

Therefore, a Kantian vigilance to the spectres of error within reason is completely flawed for Kleist. Kant's attitude was that reason's dialectical shadow-play will keep coming forever – all that you can do is be watchful to catch yourself sliding into erroneous subreption. Even though we get a character like Doña Isabel in *Das Erdbeben* as a marker to help us find our way again, there's the sense that for Kleist, it wouldn't have mattered if they had indeed heeded her feeling of foreboding. That it would have been something else that got Josefa and Jerónimo even if it wasn't the church congregation. It's easy to see why Kleist's work often takes on the hue of a malevolent fate, because he pushes the odds so hard against his characters it seems like something more sinister than actuality. We can convincingly argue however that Kleist's works aren't about determinism as such, but rather (that which yields the same outcome), that his characters choose their own paths, use their reason to navigate a world not already predetermined, *but it doesn't matter in the slightest anyway*. Try as you might the actual is replete with errors because human beings are flawed and error prone.

Kleist's actual is permanently escalated because to him, neutrality is the ever-lost guiding truth. When God and grand narratives are revealed as absent, whatever remains will appear daemonic, will appear to destroy "whatever man tries to build" in Geary's words. What better medium for articulating this apparent thwarting tendency of the actual than storytelling and drama? The irony is of course that in doing so, Kleist was warning about the pursuit of the absolute through a medium favoured by his contemporaries for pursuing some sort of *aesthetic* or *poetic* romantic absolute.⁹⁶ He negates the transcendent of a supposedly transcendent medium through terminal

⁹⁶ Yet, the tableaux that Felgentrev found when discovering the bodies of Kleist and Vogel has been described by Karl Heinz Bohrer as "carefully planned and almost staged" - *Suddenness: On the Moment of the Aesthetic Appearance*. Trans. by Ruth Crowley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 173. Similarly, by Hilda M. Brown as 'stage-managed' - "Ripe Moments and False Climaxes: Thematic and Dramatic Configurations of the Theme of Death in Kleist's Works" in *A Companion to The Works of Heinrich von Kleist*. Ed. Bernd Fischer. (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2003), 210. This does suggest a final aesthetic act by Kleist, even if Brown notes that the very act of suicide "damaged his reputation, delayed the publication of his works, and stood in the way of an unbiased appreciation of his oeuvre for at least 100 years." Ibid. 211.

ascension and chronic modal inflammation. *Escalation*. We experience being escalated close enough to the absolute to singe our eyebrows, Kleist holds us there for as long as we can bear before unceremoniously dropping us, allowing earth's gravity to suck us back down onto *terra firma* with a 'thud'. We, like Kleist's characters are continually punished for falling for his poetics, the second we, for a moment think of transcendence... 'Thud.' The thud of the fall or the arrow piercing Achilles' windpipe? Again, either way the result is the same.

*(Loud Thunder)*⁹⁷

So, what can we do when the Kantian warning of staying within the safe confines of a properly utilised reason appear ostensibly no safer than sailing off into dialectical abstractions? The advice to not go seeking the transcendent in the actual is fine except that, as we've seen, our reason restlessly seeks it without our approval. As the very nature of reason itself, the *actuality* of conscious beings is characterised by the errors that emerge from *being conscious beings*. The advice Kleist gives Ulrike in his letter of 1800 which we saw earlier takes on new shading when read against the lesson of *Penthesilea* – “concentrate, then, on this limited span of time. Do not concern yourself with your purpose after death, for in so doing you may easily neglect your purpose in this world.”⁹⁸ If you bring a conviction of loss to a view of the horizon, you will only sense what's disappeared over it, and, mourning this, focussed on the *over there*, only seek the vanishing point of the actual. Sailing off in pursuit of this point, the water is likely to get choppy and choppy. How do you get beyond the waves? You'd have to *row through infinity*.⁹⁹

*(Exeunt omnes)*¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ From stage directions in, H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea”, *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 245.

⁹⁸ September 15, 1800, to WvZ. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 63.

⁹⁹ “... just as two intersecting lines, converging on one side of a point, reappear on the other after their passage through infinity... just as our image, as we approach a concave mirror, vanishes to infinity only to reappear before our very eyes.” H.v. Kleist, “Über Das Marionettentheatre”. P.B. Miller, *An Abyss Deep Enough*, 216.

¹⁰⁰ From stage directions in, H.v. Kleist, “Penthesilea”, *Heinrich von Kleist: Plays*, 250.

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«Un sentimento eccentrico»

Friedrich Schlegel e il sublime romantico

*Giovanna Pinna**

ABSTRACT

È opinione diffusa che il concetto di sublime non giochi più alcun ruolo nell'estetica postkantiana, nonostante la marcata presenza del sentimento del sublime nell'arte e nella letteratura romantica europea. Questo articolo mira a mostrare come in realtà nell'estetica del romanticismo tedesco il sublime trascendentale di Kant sia stato modificato e integrato in una più ampia concezione del bello. Dall'analisi delle diverse ricorrenze del concetto nell'opera di Friedrich Schlegel emerge che il sublime, che è correlato alle nozioni di entusiasmo e di trascendentale, rappresenta la dimensione conoscitiva, metafisica e dialettica della concezione romantica dell'arte.

Parole chiave: Sublime, Romanticismo, Friedrich Schlegel, Estetica, Trascendentale

ABSTRACT

It is widely believed that the concept of the sublime no longer plays any role in post-Kantian aesthetics, despite its widespread presence as a feeling in European Romantic art and literature. This article aims to show how in fact in the aesthetics of German Romanticism Kant's transcendental sublime was modified and integrated into a broader conception of the beautiful. An analysis of the various occurrences of the concept in Friedrich Schlegel's work shows that the sublime, which is related to the ideas of enthusiasm and the transcendental, represents the cognitive, metaphysical and dialectical dimension of the Romantic conception of art

Keywords: Sublime, Romanticism, Friedrich Schlegel, Aesthetics, Transcendental

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1. Introduzione

Esiste un sublime romantico o, meglio, esiste una teoria romantica del sublime? Che la sublimità, principalmente intesa come tensione verso l'infinito e il soprannaturale, sia parte integrante della cultura romantica europea è infatti opinione corrente, ma nel senso di «un'atmosfera, un pensiero implicito», come poetica immanente e non come tema di riflessione filosofica.¹ Sebbene infatti il sublime come istanza di trascendimento dell'umano,² o come tensione verso l'infinito e il soprannaturale, che spesso rasenta il grottesco e il fantasticamente negativo, sia una componente essenziale della produzione letteraria e dell'arte figurativa del Romanticismo, la presenza del concetto di sublime nel quadro delle estetiche filosofiche si riduce progressivamente dopo Kant e Schiller. Nonostante il loro enorme influsso sull'elaborazione delle teorie estetiche dell'idealismo, gli scritti teorici di Schiller sembrano rappresentare, come osserva James Kirwan, “il canto del cigno” della riflessione filosofica sul sublime.³ Vi sarebbe dunque una sorta di transizione tra la teoria e la prassi artistica: il sublime paradossalmente svanisce dall'orizzonte filosofico quanto più entra nella configurazione dell'universo artistico e dell'immaginario romantico.⁴

Tale divaricazione tra la teoria filosofica e la pratica artistica o, in altri termini, tra il discorso *sul* sublime e il discorso *del* sublime,⁵ appare tuttavia assai meno scontata e, per l'appunto, paradossale, se si considera la programmatica interazione tra poesia, critica e riflessione filosofica nella cultura del Romanticismo tedesco. Nelle pagine che seguono mi propongo di mostrare come nell'estetica romantica il sublime non si sia semplicemente dissolto, ma si sia, per così dire, infiltrato nella teoria del bello, modificandone i tratti fondamentali. La posizione teorica di Friedrich

¹ D. Peyrache-Leborgne, *La Poétique du sublime de la fin des Lumières au romantisme. Diderot, Schiller, Wordsworth, Shelley, Hugo, Michelet*, Paris, Champion, 1997, p. 9.

² T. Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime. Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*, Baltimore-London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 3.

³ J. Kirwan, *Sublimity. The Non-Rational and the Irrational in the History of Aesthetics*, New York-London, Routledge, 2005, p. 85.

⁴ Un'analisi della produttività artistica del sublime nella letteratura romantica (di contro alla sua presunta irrilevanza teorica) si trova in W. Erhardt, *Verbotene Bilder? Das Erhabene, das Schöne und die moderne Literatur*, «Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft» 39 (1997), p. 79-106. Secondo B. Saint Girons si può bensì rilevare la presenza del sublime nell'estetica post-kantiana, sia in Francia che in Germania, ma senza alcuna variazione rispetto al modello tradizionale (*Le Sublime de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Paris, Desjonquères, 2005, p. 110); una posizione che non tiene conto del superamento del modello dualistico bello-sublime nell'estetica romantica e del fatto che quest'ultima, diversamente da quella kantiana, riguarda essenzialmente l'arte.

⁵ Così P. de Bolla in un testo divenuto di riferimento sull'argomento: *The Discourse of the Sublime. Readings in History, Aesthetics and the Subject*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p. 10 ss.

Schlegel, che a parte poche eccezioni è assente nelle trattazioni della teoria del sublime, rappresenta a mio avviso un momento significativo di tale trasformazione.

2. Bellezza, bruttezza e sublime

Bisogna innanzitutto chiedersi che cosa cambia e che cosa rimane della concezione del sublime come componente fondamentale dell'«estetica duplice» del XVIII secolo.⁶ Si possono rilevare due circostanze che indicano una trasformazione del modello teorico di base dell'estetica post-kantiana: l'affievolimento progressivo del concetto del sublime come strutturalmente opposto al bello e la decisa marginalizzazione della natura come oggetto dell'esperienza estetica. Un ruolo chiave in questo passaggio è svolto da Schiller, che istituendo una relazione diretta tra il concetto di sublime e la fenomenologia del tragico, sposta l'asse del discorso sulla teoria della rappresentazione artistica ed allo stesso tempo tende ad esplicitare, oggettivandola, la componente pratica del sublime kantiano, dapprima nel concetto di sublime patetico, poi nell'idea del caos come proiezione negativa dell'autonomia della ragione morale. In sostanza, Schiller riconduce alla struttura antitetica del sublime il conflitto tragico come messa in scena rovesciata della libertà umana. La filosofia dell'arte di Schelling si pone esplicitamente in una linea di continuità con la posizione schilleriana nella misura in cui ripropone in maniera pressoché letterale il nesso tra sublime, caos e contraddizione tragica.⁷ Allo stesso tempo Schelling depotenzia l'opposizione tra bello e sublime riducendola a una differenza quantitativa, nell'intento di ricondurre i due concetti ad una nozione sovraordinata di bellezza. Questa integrazione del sublime nel bello è il tratto caratterizzante di un mutamento di tendenza che accomuna le teorie dell'arte del romanticismo e del primo idealismo, e tuttavia la sua funzione è intesa diversamente a seconda della relazione che il sublime intrattiene con la determinazione storico-concettuale dell'arte. Se infatti nella metafisica dell'arte di Schelling il discorso sulla sublimità guarda soprattutto alla tragedia e nel quadro dell'opposizione antico-moderno pertiene essenzialmente all'antico, nella teoria critica di F. Schlegel esso entra in gioco

⁶ La formula è di C. Zelle, *Die doppelte Ästhetik der Moderne. Revisionen des Schönen von Boileau bis Nietzsche*, Stuttgart–Weimar, Metzler, 1995. Su Schlegel si vedano in particolare le p. 260 ss.

⁷ Nella *Philosophie der Kunst* Schelling si richiama esplicitamente allo scritto di Schiller *Über das Erhabene* (1801) per definire il nesso tra sublime e tragedia. Cfr. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst Werke*, in *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe, Nachlass*. Bd. 6.1, hrsg. von C. Binckelmann und D. Unger, Stuttgart, Frommann-Holzboog, 2018, p. 190-199.

in maniera decisiva in relazione al moderno e alle sue caratteristiche estetiche. Ma poiché, come osservava Martin Seel a proposito della riscoperta postmoderna del sublime, difficilmente si può dare una definizione positiva del sublime al di fuori della sua relazione oppositiva al bello,⁸ che cosa caratterizza il sublime romantico, che del bello finisce per diventare parte integrante? E che cosa resta della componente dialettica del sublime kantiano?

Il termine sublime compare a più riprese, con leggeri spostamenti di focus, sia negli scritti poetologici di Schlegel, sia nelle lezioni sulla filosofia trascendentale, ed è di volta in volta definito in connessione con il brutto, il trascendentale e l'entusiasmo. La prima, assai rilevante occorrenza è nel saggio del 1795 *Sullo studio della poesia greca*, nel quadro di una discussione che ha ancora come sfondo filosofico la *Critica del Giudizio* e i suoi esiti nell'estetica di Schiller e mira alla definizione della modernità artistica. A dispetto del titolo, come ammette l'autore stesso nella *Prefazione*, il suo vero oggetto è infatti la cultura moderna, le sue linee di tendenza e le sue radici storico-ideologiche.⁹ Solo nell'ultima parte dello scritto Schlegel giunge a un'analisi delle forme e allo sviluppo della letteratura greca: questa può essere adeguatamente compresa – egli scrive – solo tracciando innanzitutto «una caratteristica non del tutto incompleta della poesia moderna» e definendo la relazione che quest'ultima intrattiene con i modelli classici¹⁰. Il rovesciamento di prospettiva è di per sé significativo: se è vero che il giovane Schlegel attribuisce alla poesia greca una sorta di normatività atemporale, poiché in essa le leggi oggettive della bellezza appaiono realizzate al massimo grado, è però la poesia moderna, in cui egli ravvisa il prodotto di una rottura dell'equilibrio tra soggetto e mondo, la lente attraverso cui viene letta la classicità. L'intenzione di difendere la cultura greca si trasforma dunque in un atto fondante del paradigma della modernità, che ha fatto dell'interessante ovvero dell'«energia estetica soggettiva» il suo ideale.¹¹

Le premesse teoriche della “deduzione dell'interessante” sono date, *ex negativo*, dalla definizione kantiana del bello: «secondo l'opinione della

⁸ M. Seel, *Gerechtigkeit gegenüber dem Heterogenen?*, “Merkur” 487/488 (1989), p. 916-922.

⁹ Cfr. F. Schlegel, *Die Griechen und Römer, Vorrede*, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (in seguito KFSA), vol. I, hrsg. von E. Behler et al., Paderborn, Schöningh, 1959 ss., p. 207; trad. it. *Sullo studio della poesia greca*, a cura di A. Lavagetto, Napoli, Guida, 1988, p. 58. Il testo e la prefazione apparvero in realtà nel 1797, due anni dopo la stesura di *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, in un volume che conteneva altri due scritti. La prefazione tiene conto dello scritto di Schiller *Sulla poesia ingenua e sentimentale*, che Schlegel aveva letto subito dopo la conclusione dello *Studiumaufsatz*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. Cfr. I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*. Bd. V, hrsg. von der Königlich Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin–Leipzig, 1908, p. 205 ss.

¹¹ *Die Griechen und Römer. Vorrede*, KFSA I, p. 208; trad. it. p. 59.

maggioranza dei filosofi», scrive Schlegel, un segno caratteristico del bello sarebbe che «il piacere da esso suscitato sia *disinteressato*». ¹² Nell'arte moderna la ricerca dell'oggettività come criterio della bellezza in senso proprio è stata sostituita da un interesse, pratico e conoscitivo, per la realtà nel suo rapporto con l'ideale. Ciò si esprime in una consapevole separazione tra realtà e illusione e nella estetizzazione della disarmonia, della sgradevolezza e della scissione del reale. La legittimazione estetica dell'interessante si connette tuttavia per Schlegel alla sua transitorietà, giacché la poesia moderna deve tendere ad una nuova e superiore oggettività: «Il dominio dell'interessante non può che distruggere se stesso ed è quindi *una crisi transitoria del gusto*». ¹³ Con questa formulazione ancora fortemente classicista Schlegel colloca la poesia moderna in una posizione intermedia, ovvero in un punto di tensione tra il modello greco, caratterizzato dalla compiuta unità di sensibilità e ragione, e la ricerca di una bellezza futura, la poesia dell'infinito. Nello schema di sviluppo storico delineato da Schlegel, improntato a un pensiero dialettico che si ispira alla filosofia trascendentale di Fichte, la cultura artificiale prodotta dall'azione separatrice dell'intelletto ha come fine la ricostituzione estetica dell'unità di natura e libertà. ¹⁴ In questo quadro il discorso sul bello è direttamente collegato all'esigenza di andare oltre la tendenza dell'arte moderna, imperniata sugli interessi dell'individuo, ad assorbire in sé la disarmonia del reale. «Il bello nel senso più ampio (in cui sono compresi il sublime, il bello in senso stretto e l'attraente) – si legge in *Sullo studio della poesia greca* – è la gradevole forma sensibile del bene (*die angenehme Erscheinung des Guten*)». ¹⁵ Il richiamo implicito alla formula kantiana («il bello come simbolo del bene») fa trasparire una concezione dell'ideale estetico come espressione di una compiuta cultura morale, senza che però venga meno la prerogativa dell'autonomia. Per il superamento della «crisi» dell'interessante e delle sue componenti eteronome è dunque necessario un concetto prospettivo di bellezza che deve bensì includere il principio classico della sintesi di forma e contenuto, ma come componente di un insieme dinamico. ¹⁶ Sebbene Schlegel operi ancora con uno

¹² *Die Griechen und Römer. Vorrede*, KFS I, p. 213; trad. it. p. 62.

¹³ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 254; trad. it. p. 90.

¹⁴ Su questo I. Radrizzani, *Zur Geschichte der Romantischen Ästhetik. Von Fichtes Transzendentalphilosophie zu Schlegels Transzendentalpoesie*, "Fichte-Studien" 12 (1997), p. 181-202. Si può osservare anche che la critica al fondazionalismo di Fichte è successiva allo *Studiumaufsatz*, in cui tuttavia si scorge già l'esigenza di storicizzare il trascendentale che di quella critica è parte.

¹⁵ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 288; trad. it. p. 116.

¹⁶ «Il dominio dell'interessante, del caratteristico e del manierato è una vera *eteronomia estetica* nella poesia bella», *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 270; trad. it. p. 103.

strumentario concettuale di derivazione kantiana e schilleriana, nella sua rilettura dell'opposizione tra bello e sublime ciò che resta è l'antitesi limite-illimitato e, soprattutto, la tensione dialettica che in Kant è interna al concetto di sublime è trasferita alla relazione del sublime col bello. Lo spostamento dell'asse teorico risponde ad un'esigenza che troviamo anche nella revisione cui Schiller sottopone l'estetica di Kant: superare la distinzione tra sfera teoretica e sfera pratica (ovvero tra intelletto e ragione) nella determinazione del concetto e della funzione del bello artistico. Il «bello in senso stretto» è, afferma Schlegel, la perfezione della forma, «l'apparenza di una molteplicità finita in un'unità condizionata», cioè la piena risoluzione di un certo contenuto ideale in una forma compiuta. La bellezza così intesa, tuttavia, corrisponde ad uno stadio passato dello sviluppo della cultura.¹⁷ Il limite, elemento intrinseco del «bello in senso stretto», non può essere il principio cui deve tendere l'arte moderna, prodotto di una cultura improntata all'attività analitico-disgregante dell'intelletto. In questo ampliamento dell'idea di bellezza, che per diversi aspetti anticipa la teoria propriamente romantica della poesia universale e progressiva, il bello deve coesistere con il sublime e con l'attraente (*das Reizende*). Quest'ultimo designa l'elemento sensuale ed emozionale del fenomeno artistico, l'energia che spinge il fruitore verso la percezione dell'idealità, e ad esso è attribuita la funzione di

mezzo e organo dell'arte ideale, [...] la forza che provoca l'apparire sensibile dello spirituale e gli dà una fisicità, esattamente come la libera essenza umana può esistere empiricamente solo nell'elemento di un organismo animale.¹⁸

Schlegel osserva che quest'energia può essere positiva o negativa, può produrre gioia o dolore, riconducendo in tal modo al denominatore comune

¹⁷ Lo *Studiumaufsatz* occupa certamente una posizione intermedia nello sviluppo della teoria estetica di Schiller, tanto da essere considerato da alcuni critici come testo pre-romantico, espressione di un classicismo che ha come punti di riferimento principali Winckelmann e Kant. Così ad esempio F. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative. The Concept of Early German Romanticism*, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 106-130. È tuttavia evidente che l'idea che la poesia moderna debba tendere ad un ideale di bellezza che include il bello nel senso classico ma non coincide con esso e che questa tensione non possa mai giungere a compimento è un'anticipazione della progressività infinita che nei frammenti caratterizza il romantico.

¹⁸ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 289; trad. it. p. 116 ss. Sull'utilizzo ricorrente, anche in contesti estetici, di categorie connesse al concetto di vita si veda M. Böhm, *Dialektik bei Friedrich Schlegel. Zwischen transzendentaler Erkenntnis und absolutem Wissen*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2020, p. 128 ss.

della bellezza i fenomeni estetici incentrati su sentimenti negativi come il tragico.

Il sublime è invece definito «la forma sensibile dell'infinito»,¹⁹ il prodotto della originaria tensione dell'individuo verso l'assoluto. In termini logici gli elementi della triade estetica, bello, attraente e sublime, corrispondono alle categorie di unità, molteplicità e totalità (*Allheit*), laddove la totalità altro non è che l'unità del molteplice.²⁰ Si può osservare che – diversamente da Schiller, che soprattutto con il concetto di sublime patetico stabilisce una connessione diretta con la sfera dei conflitti morali – in Schlegel sembra prevalere un'accezione metafisico-conoscitiva del concetto di sublime, neoplatonicamente inteso come elevazione dell'animo, sotto cui rientrano le diverse forme di bellezza artistica.

Nonostante la riduzione del negativo come fattore interno del sublime, nel saggio *Sullo studio della poesia greca* la concezione burkiana del «*delightful horror*» ha lasciato tuttavia una traccia nella teoria del brutto. Poiché il testo si sviluppa come un'intersezione tra un'estetica filosofica embrionale che raccoglie i suggerimenti del pensiero speculativo moderno e una storia critica della poesia, il concetto di brutto si presenta con diverse funzioni (in parte contrastanti): come termine di riferimento per un «completo codice criminale estetico», come tratto caratteristico della cultura moderna, o come complemento del sublime. Il bello non è dunque opposto al sublime, ma al brutto, che Schlegel definisce «la sgradevole forma sensibile» del male, qualcosa che offende i sensi e provoca repulsione morale. Il concetto, del quale in prima battuta, in quanto correlato del bello e da esso inseparabile, viene affermata la rilevanza per la definizione di un criterio di valutazione estetica, acquista una portata teorica più ampia in relazione all'integrazione del sublime nella nozione di bellezza.²¹ Se infatti il brutto come opposto del bello in senso stretto è pura negazione, vale a dire vuoto, mancanza di forma, fusione non riuscita di unità e molteplicità, in quanto rovescio del sublime finisce per assumere una consistenza indipendente come categoria estetica. Al sublime, duplicemente connotato come forma sensibile «dell'infinito

¹⁹ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFSa I, p. 313; trad. it. p.134.

²⁰ Su questa relazione logica poggia in generale la concezione schlegeliana del sapere dell'assoluto. Così ad esempio in *Philosophische Lehrjahre I*, KFSa XVIII, p. 12, n. 84: «Allheit eine in sich selbst vollendete und vereinigte Vielheit». Cfr. anche la lettera al fratello del 16.10.1793, KFSa XXIII, p. 142.

²¹ Tra la definizione del brutto come strumento di valutazione di ciò che devia rispetto alla norma (classica) della “bellezza oggettiva” e la sua rivalutazione *de facto* come categoria estetica in relazione al sublime e all'interessante vi è in realtà una discrepanza difficilmente superabile. Su questo cfr. R.-P. Janz, *Romantisch und hässlich?*, «European Society and Culture» 5 (2010), p. 155-171.

dell'abbondanza o infinito dell'armonia» si contrappone una duplice determinazione della bruttezza: «*mancanza infinita e infinita disarmonia*».²² L'effetto di tale bruttezza sublime, che si fonda sull'aspettativa di quell'armonia e di quella perfezione, per poi negarla radicalmente, è «la disperazione, ossia un dolore assoluto e perfetto».²³ La simmetria della costruzione (brutto vs. bello e brutto vs. sublime) è in realtà solo apparente, giacché il brutto sublime, che contiene un potenziale estremo di conflitto, richiede un massimo di energia, e in quanto tale ha in sé qualcosa di bello, mentre la semplice bruttezza è semplicemente il risultato di una mancanza di energia morale e di una limitazione della creatività. La sensazione di vuoto e di disperazione è tanto più potente quanto più intenso è il desiderio di perfezione che evoca. Schlegel sembra in questo modo, attraverso il concetto di bruttezza sublime, reintrodurre il fascino del negativo e dell'oscurità che fa parte del sublime settecentesco.

C'è però una differenza fondamentale rispetto alla categoria tradizionale del sublime come sentimento misto. Mentre l'orrore evocato dal sublime, come è inteso da Kant, determina una rivincita della razionalità sulla supremazia dell'impressione sensibile, nella bruttezza sublime la tensione rimane irrisolta.²⁴ Poiché la bruttezza sublime nella sua massima espressione «contiene ancora qualcosa di bello»,²⁵ essa finisce per essere una provocazione costante per l'arte moderna, che per un verso mira all'assoluto e per l'altro non rinuncia a cogliere la paradossale manifestazione della libertà individuale negli abissi del brutto e del disgustoso. Il fatto di evocare *ex negativo* l'infinita perfezione mette il concetto di bruttezza sublime in relazione con quelle opere d'arte moderne che rientrano propriamente nella categoria dell'interessante e che si distinguono dalle altre per potenza di concezione e profondità del contenuto. Così è l'*Amleto* di Shakespeare, il cui carattere «con la sua smisurata sproporzione fra le energie attive e l'energia del pensiero è la rappresentazione più perfetta» di una indissolubile disarmonia, tale che «l'azione di questa tragedia nell'animo dello spettatore è la *disperazione al suo grado supremo*».²⁶ Una descrizione che mostra una perfetta coincidenza terminologica con la definizione della bruttezza sublime.

²² *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 313; trad. it. p. 134.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ La questione è stata discussa in dettaglio in G. Oesterle, *Entwurf einer Monographie des ästhetisch Häßlichen. Die Geschichte einer ästhetischen Kategorie von Friedrich Schlegels Studium-Aufsatz bis zu Karl Rosenkranz' Ästhetik des Häßlichen als Suche nach dem Ursprung der Moderne*, in D. Bänsch (hrsg.), *Zur Modernität der Romantik*, Stuttgart, Metzler, 1977, p. 217-297.

²⁵ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 313; trad. it. p. 134.

²⁶ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFS I, p. 248; trad. it. p. 86.

3. Dante romantico

Nei testi del periodo propriamente protoromantico, ovvero a partire dal 1797, il sublime trova la sua collocazione nel progetto di integrazione tra filosofia e poesia, come espressione primaria della ricerca dell'assoluto, e vede confermato il suo ruolo di “fattore di trasformazione” del concetto romantico di bellezza.²⁷ Tra i concetti estetici è quello che sembra essere più direttamente legato alla dimensione conoscitiva della creazione artistica, in quanto forma sensibile dell'intuizione del fondamento infinito della soggettività. Con esso Schlegel introduce nell'idea del bello una componente metafisica che esprime la vocazione filosofica della poesia romantica.²⁸ La connessione di fondo del sublime con la dimensione cognitiva dell'arte è ricorrente nei frammenti del periodo: «*Transcendentale* ha affinità con il sublime – *astratto* con il bello in senso stretto; *empirico* con l'attraente».²⁹ In un altro frammento dell'*Athenäum* si chiarisce quale sia il significato del termine trascendentale in un contesto estetico: trascendentale è la «poesia il cui alfa e omega è il rapporto dell'ideale con il reale», ovvero una poesia che mette riflessivamente in questione la relazione tra soggetto e mondo.³⁰

Un'esemplificazione del nesso fra trascendentale e sublime si trova nella lettura schlegeliana della poesia di Dante. Nello *Studiumaufsatz* la *Commedia* è presentata come «un'opera colossale», una «apparizione sublime nella notte fosca di tempi ferrei» che ha incorporato il sapere speculativo della sua epoca in una grandiosa narrazione epica.³¹ Quasi un'anticipazione del progetto romantico di fusione tra filosofia e poesia formulato più tardi nell'*Athenaeum*, essa mostra nella sua barbarie sublime il percorso che porterà la poesia romantica a una nuova bellezza e a una nuova integrazione tra natura e cultura. Se qui per un verso i termini “barbaro” e “colossale” richiamano le componenti negative del sublime settecentesco, il brutto e il terribile, per

²⁷ Vedi su questo D. Mathy, “Zur Frühromantischen Selbstaufhebung des Erhabenen im Schönen”, in C. Pries (hrsg.), *Das Erhabene. Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Großenwahn*, Weinheim, VCH Acta Humaniora, 1989, p. 143-160.

²⁸ Sul rapporto del sublime con la cultura della modernità come affermazione del principio di libertà vedi: F. Rush, *Irony and Idealism. Rereading Schlegel, Hegel & Kierkegaard*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 61 ss.

²⁹ *Fragmente zur Literatur und Poesie*, KFSa XVI, p. 152; trad. it. F. Schlegel, *Frammenti critici e poetici*, a cura di M. Cometa, Torino, Einaudi, 1998, p. 197.

³⁰ *Athenaeum*, KFSa II, p. 204, n. 238; trad. it. p. 56; così anche *Athenaeum* 22: «è trascendentale appunto ciò che sta in relazione alla connessione e alla separazione di ideale e reale», KFSa II, p. 169; trad. it. p. 33.

³¹ *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie*, KFSa 1, p. 233; trad. it. p. 77.

l'altro l'impianto filosofico dell'opera ne rivela l'affinità con il lato metafisico della sublimità. Quest'ultimo aspetto è ulteriormente sottolineato in alcuni frammenti del 1798, come in *Athenaeum* 247: «Il poema profetico di Dante è l'unico sistema della poesia trascendentale, ancora il sommo nel suo genere». ³² Il ruolo di assoluto rilievo che Schlegel assegna a Dante nel suo canone della poesia moderna dipende dalla sua "sublime" capacità di fondere poesia e filosofia, rappresentazione e astrazione. In contrasto con la bellezza in senso stretto, che è definita dalla perfezione della forma sensibile e dal suo rapporto chiuso con l'idea, il sublime come apertura verso l'infinito rappresenta il lato speculativo e filosofico dell'ideale romantico della poesia della poesia:

Il sentimento del sublime deve necessariamente sorgere per chiunque abbia fatto astrazione in modo corretto. Chi ha pensato una volta l'infinito non potrà mai più pensare il finito. – La realtà sta nell'indifferenza. ³³

Schlegel mira evidentemente a integrare in un concetto di bellezza "potenziato", cui si orienta l'ideale della poesia romantica, l'impulso verso il sovrasensibile che è insito nel sublime, senza tuttavia negare la dimensione sensuale dell'esperienza estetica. Il frammento 108 dell'*Athenaeum* esprime icasticamente questa idea di sintesi, in cui il bello appare come mediazione o risultato dell'opposizione tra piacere sensibile e impulso cognitivo: «Bello è ciò che è nel contempo attraente e sublime». ³⁴

Schlegel fa ricorso a una metafora naturalistica per illustrare lo specifico tipo di dialettica che sta alla base della configurazione dell'ideale di bellezza che ha in mente: «Sublime e attraente sono i poli della π [poesia]. Bello il centro e la corrente magnetica (Oceano) che circonda tutto - Il poeta va sempre verso il sublime e l'attraente; solo l'uomo verso il bello». ³⁵ Gli opposti, l'attraente e il sublime, sono gli elementi attivi dello schema, quelli attraverso cui opera la creazione artistica, che si orienta al fascino degli oggetti del mondo nella loro consistenza fenomenica o, al contrario, alla comprensione riflessiva del rapporto tra reale e ideale. Il bello (insieme centro e periferia) è l'unità dinamica che non si oppone più al sublime ma lo include. Si tratta di una dialettica differente da quella di Hegel, una dialettica circolare in cui gli antipodi stanno tra di loro in una relazione di reciprocità, per cui l'infinito è come tale esperibile solo nella sua individualizzazione. L'armonia appare qui

³² *Athenaeum*, KFSa II, p. 206, n. 247; trad. it. 58.

³³ *Philosophische Lehrjahre I*, KFSa XVIII, p. 415, n. 1133.

³⁴ *Athenaeum*, KFSa II, p. 181, n. 108; trad. it. p. 42.

³⁵ *Philosophische Lehrjahre I*, KFSa XVIII, p. 220, n. 309.

come una tendenza antropologica che è anche un'utopia estetica, giacché a questa totalità la bellezza artistica può solo tendere, così come la conoscenza filosofica tende alla verità assoluta senza mai coglierla nella sua interezza.

4. Ripensare la bellezza attraverso il sublime

Come si è visto sinora, il sublime è uno dei due poli da cui emerge dialetticamente la bellezza superiore. Che l'interesse di Schlegel per il ruolo del sublime prevalga su quello per la dimensione sensibile dell'esperienza estetica, emerge nei passaggi in cui il sublime è associato a un altro concetto chiave della sua poetologia: l'entusiasmo. In uno dei frammenti non destinati alla pubblicazione si legge ad esempio: «L'entusiasmo è sublime, l'armonia è bella; l'attraente non è altro che un complemento e una degenerazione».³⁶ Qui la triade dialettica sembra fondersi in un nuovo dualismo. L'atteggiamento svalutativo nei confronti della componente sensuale del fenomeno artistico dipende probabilmente dalla tendenza a concepire primariamente l'arte come manifestazione della verità, in linea con il riorientamento dell'estetica in senso cognitivo dopo Kant. Per ragioni simili, d'altra parte, la connessione tra il sublime e l'entusiasmo conferisce al primo una rilevanza teorica che non risulta immediatamente dal suo peso oggettivo all'interno dei testi dedicati alla teoria della poesia. L'entusiasmo, un concetto di conio platonico, viene infatti per un verso riferito allo slancio creativo del genio poetico e alla sua capacità di cogliere l'unità del tutto, e per l'altro, in termini più esplicitamente filosofici, designa l'impulso originario alla conoscenza. Nel primo caso il suo correlato dialettico è l'ironia, nel secondo la scepisi.³⁷ Si può cogliere senz'altro un'eco kantiana in questo nesso tra sublime ed entusiasmo, là dove Kant afferma che «estheticamente l'entusiasmo è sublime perché è una tensione delle forze prodotta da idee», le quali danno all'animo uno slancio di gran lunga più potente e durevole dell'impulso che deriva da rappresentazioni sensibili».³⁸ Del discorso kantiano sul sublime, del resto, Schlegel mutua alcuni tratti definitivi, come ad esempio l'incompatibilità con il gradevole, o lo stupore

³⁶ *Fragmente zur Litteratur und Poesie*, KFSXVI, p. 282, n. 350; trad. it. p. 367.

³⁷ La rilevanza della filosofia platonica per l'elaborazione delle coppie dialettiche *Enthusiasmus-Skepsis* e *Selbstschöpfung-Selbstvernichtung* è discussa in E. Behler: *Ironie und literarische Moderne*, Paderborn-München, 1997, 94 ss. Sulle radici platoniche del concetto schlegeliano di entusiasmo si veda inoltre P. D. Krause, *Unbestimmte Rhetorik*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 2001, p. 212 ss.

³⁸ I. Kant *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, cit., p. 272; trad. it. di A. Gargiulo, rivista da V. Verra, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1989, p. 129.

(*Verwunderung*) da cui nasce il desiderio di conoscere.³⁹ Lo stupore che accompagna la visione di oggetti terrificanti o grandiosi nella concezione kantiana del sublime naturale, tuttavia, nell'opera di Schlegel viene depurato dalla componente emozionale e inteso in termini essenzialmente cognitivi.

A conferma del fatto che la nozione schlegeliana di sublime esprima uno sbilanciamento verso la dimensione filosofico-conoscitiva dell'arte si può addurre il fatto che il sublime sorprendentemente ricorre, appaiato all'entusiasmo, in un contesto non estetico, le *Lezioni sulla filosofia trascendentale* tenute a Jena nel 1800-1801. Il punto di partenza delle considerazioni di Schlegel è il «dato di fatto» che il filosofare, come ricerca dei fondamenti della conoscenza, è un impulso necessario e originario della coscienza. Come sapere del sapere, la filosofia ha come oggetto “l'intero essere umano” nella varietà delle sue attività intellettuali e ha un carattere di esperimento, guidato da due fattori che agiscono come negativo e positivo in azione reciproca, appunto la scepisi e l'entusiasmo.⁴⁰ L'atteggiamento negativo-socratico è correlato alla spinta positiva verso l'infinito, in modo tale che l'uno costituisce la condizione necessaria dell'altro e viceversa. L'entusiasmo come «fattore della filosofia» sta in una relazione diretta con il sublime. A partire dal fatto che gli elementi della filosofia, afferma Schlegel, sono principalmente due, ossia la coscienza e l'infinito, «la coscienza dell'infinito nell'individuo [...] è il sentimento del sublime. Questo risiede in modo piuttosto rozzo nell'individuo. E questo sentimento del sublime è l'entusiasmo».⁴¹

La totalità, che rappresenta il fine ultimo (irraggiungibile) della speculazione, è dunque originariamente colta in maniera irriflessa attraverso un sentire individuale che mette in moto il processo del filosofare: «Se pensiamo a tutti i singoli e multiformi sentimenti che i cambiamenti nella vita umana suscitano, ci rimane un unico sentimento. Questo è il sentimento del

³⁹ Per un'analisi del rapporto tra sublime, entusiasmo e stupore/ammirazione in Kant vedi R. Clewis, *The Kantian Sublime and the Revelation of Freedom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 183-191.

⁴⁰ Sul ruolo della coppia concettuale “scepisi-entusiasmo” per la definizione del metodo della *Transzendentalphilosophie* vedi B. Frischmann, *Vom Transzendentalen zum Frühromantischen Idealismus. J. G. Fichte und F. Schlegel*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 2005, p. 223-228. B. Rehme-Iffert, sottolinea come l'elemento costante della teoria sia però la coesistenza dialettica dei due principi, vale a dire l'insuperabilità della ricerca positiva della verità in correlazione col dubbio scettico. Ciò implica l'impossibilità di ridurre la posizione schlegeliana ad una visione di tipo post-moderno. Cfr. *Skepsis und Enthusiasmus, Friedrich Schlegels philosophischer Grundgedanke zwischen 1796 und 1805*, Würzburg, Königshausen und Neumann, 2001, p. 62 ss. e p. 136 ss.

⁴¹ *Transzendentalphilosophie*, KFSX XII, p. 6.

sublime, e in esso troviamo l'analogia con la coscienza dell'infinito». ⁴² Questo sentimento, che non richiede "alcuna spiegazione", scaturisce dalla percezione del fondamento sovrasensibile del soggetto umano e dalla sua capacità di trascendere i limiti dell'empirico, che non è ancora arrivato alla coscienza. È quindi «l'originario nell'uomo» (*das Ursprüngliche im Menschen*) e precede la cultura. In questo, Schlegel prende le distanze da Fichte, che in diverse occasioni – in opposizione alla filosofia del sentimento individuale di Jacobi – aveva ribadito la sua avversione al pensiero che interferisce con la sfera del sentimento. La parentela del sublime con l'entusiasmo estetico, cioè con il motore della produttività artistica, diventa visibile nel fatto che esso anticipa analogicamente "nell'individuo" la fase successiva del processo speculativo, la coscienza dell'infinito. Questo non significa che Schlegel propugni una visione irrazionalistica della conoscenza filosofica, ma piuttosto un'integrazione tra pensiero e intuizione artistica. La struttura di base del discorso di Schlegel rimane il *Wechselerweis*: il finito si riferisce costantemente all'infinito e l'infinito può manifestarsi solo nel finito. Ciò significa, da un lato, che la conoscenza non procede da un unico principio, ma deve essere sempre intesa come il risultato dell'interazione tra due elementi e, dall'altro, che è esclusa la possibilità di un punto finale nel processo di conoscenza. Proprio come la spinta verso l'ideale deve confrontarsi con la realtà, il sentimento del sublime implica la percezione del finito e dell'empirico come suo negativo.

Tornando all'ambito più propriamente estetico, il sublime come elemento costitutivo dell'arte (moderna), non può esistere senza il riferimento ironico al finito e al concreto. Significativo è in tal senso un passaggio dello scritto *Über die Philosophie* a proposito dell'incompiuto, che conferisce all'immagine sublime una dignità derivante da quel che potremmo definire sprezzatura, ovvero una sorta di superiore distacco nei confronti della perfezione esteriore.

Per me – scrive Schlegel - l'incompiutezza conferisce al sublime un nuovo, superiore fascino. La sua dignità mi appare in ciò più immediata e più pura. È come se rimanesse più fedele alla sua originaria maestà quando spregia la pienezza e l'eleganza della natura formante. E come per me le fisionomie più interessanti sono quelle che appaiono come se la natura avesse impostato un grande disegno senza prendersi il tempo per mettere in atto l'ardito pensiero. ⁴³

⁴² *Transzendentalphilosophie*, KFSÄ XII, p. 7.

⁴³ F. Schlegel, *Über die Philosophie. An Dorothea*, KFSÄ VIII, p. 53.

L'incompiuto – verrebbe da pensare ai *Prigioni* di Michelangelo – è una negazione parziale della finitezza, con cui paradossalmente si afferma il predominio dell'idea sulla sua configurazione esteriore. Più tardi, nelle *Kölner Vorlesungen* (1804-1806), Schlegel fa nuovamente riferimento alla struttura contraddittoria del sublime, definito come un «sentimento eccentrico» che origina dall'eterna e insuperabile scissione tra finito e infinito, e contrapposto al potere organico e armonizzante della bellezza.⁴⁴

Il sublime entra costitutivamente nella definizione schlegeliana dell'ideale dell'arte romantica nella misura in cui traduce in allegoria la tensione del soggetto verso l'infinito e allo stesso tempo l'impossibilità di afferrare l'assoluto concettualmente. Questo risulta da un contrasto e produce una sensazione che è in qualche modo simile a quella prodotta dal movimento duplice che è alla base della *Subreption* di cui parla Kant a proposito del meccanismo cognitivo della sublimità. La tensione dialettica interna del concetto di sublime viene così preservata in esso ed è legata alla rappresentazione simbolica dell'autoriflessione del soggetto e alla sua relazione con le forme concrete dell'esistenza.

La concezione di Schlegel del sublime non può quindi essere considerata né come un fenomeno secondario all'interno della sua teoria della poesia trascendentale, né come una posizione isolata nell'estetica romantica. Una tendenza del tutto analoga a ricomprendere il sublime nell'idea di bellezza, con una conseguente riconfigurazione di quest'ultima, si trova anche, con enfasi diverse, in Schelling e in Solger. La metafisica dell'arte di Schelling, che si basa sulla visione estetica dell'unità di natura e spirito, sussume entrambi i termini sotto il concetto (sovraordinato) di «bello superiore». Se il bello costituisce il «carattere di base» dell'opera d'arte concepita come riflesso dell'identità dell'attività conscia e inconscia, il sublime, invece, come momento soggettivo della sospensione della «contraddizione infinita», rappresenta la percezione sensibile dell'opposizione originaria di soggetto e oggetto. Schelling propone una unità sintetica: «Il sublime nella sua absolutezza comprende il bello, così come il bello nella sua absolutezza comprende il sublime».⁴⁵ Sebbene il sublime sia descritto in linea di principio come una sottocategoria del bello, che rivela la spinta originale della produzione estetica, cioè l'esperienza dell'opposizione infinita di libertà e necessità, di fatto nelle lezioni sulla filosofia dell'arte viene discusso in maniera più dettagliata rispetto al bello. Va anche notato che nell'estetica schellinghiana, come accennato sopra, il sublime è legato al tragico e

⁴⁴ F. Schlegel, *Die Entwicklung der Philosophie in zwölf Büchern*, KFSX XII, p. 384.

⁴⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst*, cit., p. 193.

costituisce la base teorica di quello che Schelling considera il genere artistico più elevato, la tragedia. La definizione di sublime introdotta nella *Filosofia dell'Arte* è fortemente influenzata dallo scritto di Schiller *Sul sublime* e si riferisce principalmente ai concetti di tragico e caos. Qui, il caos, che è «la concezione di base del sublime», viene addirittura descritto come «l'essenza interna dell'assoluto, in cui tutto sta come uno e uno come tutto». ⁴⁶ In questo modo, il sublime avanza fino a diventare, quasi contro l'intenzione del filosofo, un elemento costitutivo dell'idea del bello.

La definizione di sublime di Solger, l'altro ironista dell'estetica romantica, va nella stessa direzione, secondo cui l'arte sublime rende visibile «l'idea come sviluppo, facendo emergere da sé l'opposizione dell'apparenza». ⁴⁷ La dialettica negativa dell'assoluto che si rivela nel finito è vista nell'arte sublime nel suo sviluppo, come prodotto dell'attività autoriflessiva dell'io. Questa dinamica interiore, che pone il sublime in una posizione liminale rispetto al comico, all'umoristico e al grottesco, caratterizza l'arte della modernità incentrata sulla soggettività. Sebbene la letteratura sia il riferimento principale dei teorici romantici, l'interrelazione tra infinito e negatività, che si manifesta, tra l'altro, come tendenza a rappresentare l'invisibile, costituisce uno dei presupposti teorici più o meno impliciti delle arti visive degli ultimi due secoli, da Caspar David Friedrich e Turner alla pittura astratta. ⁴⁸ In definitiva, si tratta di una forma di sublime che ha poco a che fare con la magniloquenza retorica o la grandezza eroica, solitamente associate al termine e che rendono problematico il suo utilizzo nella cultura moderna. L'esigenza conoscitiva e critica che gli è consustanziale fa sì che esso non possa tuttavia essere ridotto ad una istanza irrazionalistica o, se si vuole, puramente decostruttiva della realtà. D'altra parte il concetto del sublime romantico rappresenta un modello alternativo – o quanto meno complementare – alla concezione naturalistico-emozionale del sublime su cui è incentrato il recente dibattito al riguardo ⁴⁹. Insomma, forse è possibile riconsiderare la portata teorica del sublime senza tornare al

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ K. W. F. Solger: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik*, hrsg. von G. Pinna, Hamburg, Meiner, 2017, p. 70. Per un'analisi più dettagliata rimando a G. Pinna, *Zum Verhältnis von Schönheit und Erhabenheit bei Solger*, in A. Baillot, M. Galland-Szymkowiak (hrsg.) *Grundzüge der Philosophie K.W.F. Solgers*, Wien–Berlin, Lit Verlag, 2014, p. 39-50.

⁴⁸ Su questa accezione di sublime come chiave interpretativa della pittura romantica L. Cahen-Maurel, *The Simplicity of The Sublime. A New Picturing of Nature in Caspar David Friedrich*, in D. Nassar (ed.), *The Relevance of Romanticism. Essays on German Romantic Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 186-201.

⁴⁹ Questa posizione, che ha come principale riferimento filosofico la teoria di Burke, nega qualsiasi rilevanza al sublime dell'arte. Si veda ad esempio E. Brady, *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 120.

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postmoderno o seguire esclusivamente la via di un'estetica naturalistico-riduzionistica della ricezione.

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Faith, Love, and Marriage

The Place of Christianity and Zinzendorf in Novalis'

Philosophy of the Higher Self

*Jack Haughton**

ABSTRACT

Accounts of Novalis' philosophy of religion, in Anglophone historiography, have not taken adequate account of the metaphysical consequences of his divergence from Fichte. Making a Kantian critique of Fichte's absolutely posited subject, Novalis' subject has no being *per se* but only insofar as it is situated in God. This situating *qua* gaining of being, however, requires the presence of God's moral essence within the subject. I find that the attainment of such a moral essence, in Novalis' philosophy, is best considered in the light of his Moravian background, and more particularly of the Moravian doctrine of the spouse as a sacramental vehicle to unity with Christ. Novalis' higher self, then, unlike that of Fichte, is attained from without - by faithful love for another - whereby God's essence is mediated and the subject's gaining of being is enabled.

Keywords: Novalis, Kant, Fichte, Moravian, philosophy of religion

RÉSUMÉ

Les commentaires portant sur la philosophie de la religion de Novalis (dans le domaine anglophone) n'ont pas pensé de manière adéquate les conséquences métaphysiques de sa divergence avec Fichte. La critique aux accents kantien qu'il développe du sujet fichtéen qui se pose lui-même de façon absolue montre bien que le sujet, pour Novalis, n'a pas d'être en soi : il n'existe qu'à être situé en Dieu. Cette situation en Dieu, en tant que gain d'être, suppose toutefois la présence de l'essence morale de Dieu dans le sujet. Le présent article démontre que c'est l'éclairage par ses origines moraves, plus particulièrement la doctrine morave du conjoint comme véhicule sacramentel de l'unité avec le Christ, qui permet le mieux de comprendre comment, dans la philosophie de Novalis, une telle essence morale divine peut être atteinte. Le moi supérieur au sens de Novalis, contrairement à celui de Fichte, est, dès lors, atteint de l'extérieur – par un amour fidèle pour un autre être, où la médiation de l'essence de Dieu s'exerce et un gain d'être pour le sujet devient possible.

Mots-clés : Novalis, Kant, Fichte, Frères moraves, philosophie de la religion

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1. Introduction: Novalis the Moravian

The principal aim of this paper is to offer an interpretation of Novalis' thought which answers a problem that I take to be substantially unaddressed in Anglophone scholarship, regarding his moral philosophy and philosophy of religion. In so doing, I take seriously Novalis' Moravian heritage, in particular the potential influence of Zinzendorf. I begin by sketching my understanding of Novalis' position and its relation to (as I understand them) those chiefly influential on his own: the views of Kant, Fichte, and the quasi-Spinozist metaphysics presented by Jacobi. Paralleling this, I indicate my relation to the Anglophone historiography on Novalis, thereby illustrating what I consider to be a current conceptual inadequacy in parts of the scholarship. Centrally, it is the problem in Novalis of accounting for the subject's divine (i.e. moral) character – paralleling the divine essence – when he (despite adopting Fichtean terminology) levies a Kantian critique at Fichte's absolutely posited (and therefore inherently moral) self, thereby framing all being as participation in a (quasi-)Spinozist, *moral* God. In this connection, I argue that Zinzendorf's view of the spouse as a metaphysically mediating Christ seems to have influenced Novalis, in which the latter's higher self becomes moral on account of an analogous mediation. I set forth precisely how their respective thought may be considered as interrelated, before briefly surveying the textual and historical support for Zinzendorf's influence on Novalis, as well as the historiographical treatment of these references. Thereafter, I offer a reading of Novalis' philosophy from this perspective, focusing on his higher self, in order to demonstrate its substantial possibility.

2. From Kant and Fichte to Zinzendorf

Kant claims that the (free) I is “merely intelligible”: an “idea of reason” that cannot be given representation (*Vorstellung*).¹ The I cannot be made the object of a cognition, and therefore has no identity that may be posited. Contra Kant, Fichte asserts that the I has being *per se*: it is its own ground:

We can point to something from which this category [of reality] is itself derived: namely, the I, as absolute subject. For everything else to which this category of reality could possibly be applied, it must be shown that

¹ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, second edition, 1787, ed. & trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). See “The Antinomy of Pure Reason”, 511-550 (539-540), and “Conclusion of the Solution of the Psychological Paralogism”, 455.

reality is transferred to it *from the I* — that it must exist insofar as the I exists.²

Because the being of the I is asserted, Fichte abrogates Kant's separation of "nature" and practical reason's "intelligible order" (wherein the idea of the free I is imaginatively applied to perception, which thus "transfers" us from "nature" *qua* realm of empirical cognitions).³ Instead, there is simply the I and, posited within it, the *Not-I*. From the absolute I is derived the *Divisible I*, against which there is posited the *Divisible Not-I*. The divisions of these two entities are interrelated, whereby Fichte's subject may enact the process of (negatively) representing itself.⁴ Fichte's subject, however, is not *in* God, or otherwise contingently existent upon anything else, because it is posited absolutely. The moral effort of self-realisation is therefore rehearsed *within the subject*: between the higher self (divisible self) and everyday self; in short, the *Divisible I* (or higher self) is *inherently* moral.⁵ The inherent morality of Fichte's *Divisible I* is co-extensive, then, with the I being posited absolutely. Novalis' adoption of a Kantian critique of this position (early in his *Fichte Studien*, especially nos. 1-5) therefore abrogates this: claiming that a subject cannot be said to have identity abstracted from empirical relations, and thus that the assertion of the I's identity with itself (and thus its absolute positing) is a logical fallacy: "consciousness is consequently an image of being within being."⁶

Novalis, unlike Kant, argues that the subject exists *in* God. God is a metaphysical reality: the absolute. This is an important distinction, wherein I agree (as Dalia Nassar does) with Frederick Beiser's claim that Novalis' understanding of "Being" is the neo-Spinozist organic absolute - which is "an organism... in a constant process of growth and development", and behind this growth there is "a purpose... or idea" - rather than, as Manfred Frank argues, a Kantian regulative idea of existence.⁷ Because Novalis' subject

² J.G. Fichte, *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794-95)*, ed. & trans. Daniel Breazeale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), "First, Purely and Simply Unconditioned Foundational Principle", 206.

³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 402-403. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. & trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 37-38.

⁴ Fichte, *Foundation*, "Third Foundational Principle, Conditioned with Respect to its Form", 210-224.

⁵ See also Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795-1804* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 32-33, 39.

⁶ Novalis *Fichte Studies*, ed. & trans. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), no. 2, 5.

⁷ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 15, 23, 29; Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 352; Manfred

exists *in* God – the sphere of being – the (Kantian) subject’s lack of *identity*, *qua* abstraction from empirical relations, is understood as a lack of *being*. We exist, as free subjects without being, alongside nature (the *Not-I*), *in* God. Being is constructed by forming relations between subjects and nature: I and *Not-I*. This is substantially the understanding of Beiser and Nassar: being is formed through modifying nature, and this modification follows the model of a Kantian judgement, i.e. an essentially internal reference.⁸ Nassar however, unlike Beiser, (rightly) argues that Novalis adopts Fichte’s *Divisible I* (higher self) and *Divisible Not-I* model, and her understanding of Novalis’ absolute is concomitantly more precise.⁹

This is to say that being is formed – which is to say *personality* is formed – through an enactment (i.e. judgement) of reason. Nevertheless, following the Kantian critique of Fichte’s absolutely posited self, this *reason* cannot be considered identical with (i.e. *inherent to*) the self (e.g. *qua Divisible I*). Rather, Novalis’ subject is *in* God, who is a moral reality. Because God, who is the absolute sphere of being, is moral, morality is a condition of being. God, considered as the (not merely *necessary*) idea or moral essence of the absolute, must therefore be mediated to the subject in order for them to participate in being. The subject’s attaining of being, the formation of their personality by relating I to *Not-I*, therefore turns raw nature into a determination of self *and* God.

The question remains, however, as to how Novalis’ subject is to acquire this mediation – i.e. acquire such moral, ideal material out of which relating judgements may be constituted – and thereby gain being and realise God in nature. Here is my principal break with Anglophone historiography. Novalis’ subject is simply presumed to be inherently moral (i.e. divine) – realising God in the world – by Nassar, who rightly perceives the Fichtean categories of higher self and everyday self as pivotal in Novalis but assumes the unproblematic transference of the Fichtean higher self’s inherent morality despite Novalis’ very un-Fichtean ontology (which her book superbly elaborates).¹⁰ Nassar’s assumption is not uncommon; for example, Cahen-Maurel also assumes Novalis’ adoption of Fichte’s intrinsically moral self in her claim that the (Fichtean) “productive or creative imagination” of Novalis’ subject is based upon “exceptional inner moral and *spiritual* power.” Consequently, her thesis that Novalis goes beyond Fichte by way of

Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2004), 29-30, 51, 61-62.

⁸ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 422-423.

⁹ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 32-33, 39, 66-67.

¹⁰ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 32-33, 39, 66-67.

synthesising Schiller's concept of the self's "power of love" realising "the idea of God" in the world, with Fichte's "productive imagination", assumes the self's *innate* ability to love – i.e. the will's coincidence with God's.¹¹ Christine Weder makes the same assumption.¹² That Novalis' subject is to share in the divine essence and thereby enact a divine *Bildung* is uncontroversial, then, but little discussion (in Anglophone historiography) has been offered, to my knowledge, as to how.

Rather than derivative from any absolutely posited I, Novalis' divisible I (i.e. higher self) is instead, I argue, chosen from without and made, by an effort of *faith*, into an inwardly beheld idea. This idea *mediates* Christ, viz. God's moral essence: the idea behind the absolute. The higher self is necessary for the formation of personality in terms of providing the ideal material for the formation of individual relations to the *Not-I*, and its moral correspondence to God because these relations are *in* Him. Moreover, the subject relates to their higher self both as idea and as another person, and more particularly as a beloved (which Adrian Daub has noted).¹³ It is fruitful to consider Zinzendorf's influence in particular with regard to this inner idea of another mediating Christ.

For Zinzendorf, the believer is married to Christ (that is, *individually* rather than *qua* corporate personality of the invisible church). Importantly, this salvific marriage is experienced in devotion to the spouse and to the "dear little sidehole" (from the Roman soldier's spear on the cross) of Christ. Accordingly, the human spouse is conceived as a mystical vehicle to Christ, with sexual intercourse being considered a sacrament on par with communion.¹⁴ Moreover, depiction of Christ reflects His status as Husband to the believer. In particular, Christ is imagined as the wounded, dead husband, whose "cold dead lips" and "dear little sidehole" become the object of a tender love expressed in hymnal form.¹⁵ Centrally, then, Zinzendorf's

¹¹ Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1 (2019): 152-161.

¹² Christine Weder, "Moral Interest and Religious Truth: On the Relationship between Morality and Religion in Novalis," *German Life and Letters*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (October 2001), fn. 31.

¹³ Adrian Daub, *Uncivil Unions: The Metaphysics of Marriage in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 116-119.

¹⁴ Nicholas von Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses on the Redemption of Man by the death of Christ preached at Berlin* (London: James Hutton, 1740), 12, 35, 40, 49-50, 76, 81, 85-86, 93, 99. Nicholas von Zinzendorf, *Hymns composed for the use of the brethren* (London: 1749), no. 24: 3; Peter Vogt [trans.], "Zinzendorf's 'Seventeen Points of Matrimony': A Fundamental Document on the Moravian Understanding of Marriage and Sexuality," *Journal of Moravian History* 11, no. 10 (Spring 2011), *passim*, esp. no. 12: 48.

¹⁵ Craig Atwood, "Understanding Zinzendorf's Blood and Wounds Theology," *Journal of Moravian History* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 2006), esp. 33-35; Craig Atwood [trans.], "Zinzendorf's

marital Christology begets a duality in the object of love: Christ is made the object of a marital love, and relations to the human spouse are concomitantly invested with metaphysical significance.¹⁶ For example, in a hymnal work, Zinzendorf relates that from the “Moravian Handmaid” of marriage does “shine” the image of Christ to her spouse.¹⁷

Novalis’ higher self, I argue, is best conceived in relation to Zinzendorf’s “marital theology” (*Ehereligion*).¹⁸ As I understand it, a Zinzendorfic reading yields that the subject relates to their higher self maritally, as a beloved - analogous to Zinzendorf’s metaphysical spouse; and, by extension, the subject relates to Christ as “the beloved”, through this mediating higher self. My reading of Novalis’ work bears out this possibility as a serious one, and I consider Novalis’ plausible proximity to Zinzendorf’s idiosyncratic mixture of sanguine and marital (almost erotic) hymnal language, as well as his notion of marriage to Christ (viz. salvation) beginning with a spectral vision of Christ through the “Eyes of faith.”¹⁹ In the broader context of Novalis’ metaphysics, I consider it most plausible that Novalis’ subject is *married* to Christ by way of their marriage to a mediating higher self.

This in my view substantiates Novalis’ historical involvement with the Moravians, having been educated to be a preacher in the Moravian school at

“Litany of the Wounds”, *Lutheran Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1997), esp. 204-208; Zinzendorf, *Discourses*, 135.

¹⁶ See also Paul Peucker, ““Inspired by Flames of Love”: Homosexuality, Mysticism, and Moravian Brothers around 1750”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan., 2006), 30-64; Paul Peucker, “In the Blue Cabinet: Moravians, Marriage, and Sex”, *Journal of Moravian History*, No. 10 (Spring 2011), 6-37. Craig Atwood, “Sleeping in the Arms of Christ: Sanctifying Sexuality in the Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Jul., 1997), 25-51.

¹⁷ Zinzendorf, *Hymns composed*, no. 24: 3.

¹⁸ Sean Hannan and W. Ezekiel Goggin have also emphasised the Moravian mystical marriage as important for Novalis. Their work rightly notices “the parallel between Novalis’ ecstasy in the Hymns and the sexually charged devotion to the “side hole” of Christ we find in Moravian theology”, but it does not move from noticing a “parallel” to discussions of a more concrete nature. Hannan and Goggin’s reading of Novalis as a “mystic” may account for this stylistic distinction between my aims and theirs. Furthermore, whilst I applaud their comparisons to Bernard of Clairvaux’s bridal mysticism whereby the lover’s love is “an expression of the mutual longing that unites the soul to Christ”, the question of the nature of this as “an expression of” is unelaborated. Moreover, their referencing of Bernard’s love-object as Christ, with the parallel connection that “Bernard’s love mysticism provides a lens through which we can examine the language of love in the Brouillon”, clashes with their claim that Novalis’ “mystical eros... can open poetic spaces for mystical intimation of the Absolute”, as opposed to Christ. A thoroughgoing ontological discussion, such as I here attempt, might illumine these nevertheless fertile comparisons. Ultimately, Hannan and Goggin do not appear to take my view that, for Novalis, Christ is mediated through a human beloved. W. Ezekiel Goggin and Sean Hannan, *Mysticism and Materialism in the Wake of German Idealism* (London: Routledge, 2022), 92-98.

¹⁹ Zinzendorf, *Discourses*: 14-18, 77-78, 92, 99; Zinzendorf, *Hymns composed*, no. 83: 9.

Neudietendorf, as well as his avid readership of the bible and Zinzendorf (two of whose songbooks and whose *Deutsche Gedichte* Novalis is known to have owned), as noted by his brother Karl.²⁰ Lastly, it is worth remarking that visions were experienced by Novalis' father, who was also affiliated with the Moravians.²¹ A reading of Novalis as influenced by Zinzendorf in this manner thus makes conceptual and historical sense. Furthermore, mentions of Zinzendorf's influence, or of the Moravians more generally, do appear in Novalis' writings,²² but have received scant (Anglophone) historiographical treatment. One particular instance is a letter to Friedrich Schlegel from July, 1796:

I feel more in everything that I am the sublime member of an infinite whole, into which I have grown and which should be the shell of my ego. Must I not happily suffer everything, now that I love and love more than the eight spans of space, and love longer than all the vascillations of the chords of life? Spinoza and Zinzendorf have investigated it, the infinite idea of love, and they have an intuition of its method, of how they could develop it for themselves, and themselves for it, on this speck of dust. It is a pity that I see nothing of this view in Fichte, that I feel nothing of this creative breath. But he is close to it. He must step into its magic circle.²³

Despite often quoting this letter, Anglophone historiography never meaningfully connects Zinzendorf to Novalis. Benjamin Crowe reads the reference to Zinzendorf as demonstrable of a merely *general* Christian colouring to Novalis' reception of Spinoza; John Neubauer takes a similar reading, whereas Beiser ignores it and Frank glosses Novalis' reference as more properly indicative of (the Platonist) Hemsterhuis' influence. Cahen-Maurel, whilst noting the reference to Spinoza, reads this letter (I think accurately) as indicating Novalis' critical distance from Fichte, but not as

²⁰ Karl von Hardenberg, "Biography of His Brother Novalis 1802," in *The Birth of Novalis: Friedrich von Hardenberg's Journal of 1797, with Selected Letters and Documents*, ed. & trans. Bruce Donehower (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 109; August Cölestin Just, "Friedrich von Hardenberg, Assessor of Salt Mines in Saxony and Designated Department Director in Thuringia, Born May 2, 1772, Died March 25, 1801," in *Birth of Novalis*, 112, 122, 123. John Neubauer, *Bifocal Vision: Novalis' Philosophy of Nature and Disease* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 166.

²¹ Lilian. R. Furst., "Novalis' *Hymnen an die Nacht* and Nerval's *Aurélia*," *Comparative Literature* 21, no. 1 (Winter 1969), 36.

²² Novalis, "Christianity or Europe: A Fragment," in *The Early Political Writings of The German Romantics*, ed. & trans. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1996), 67; Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, ed. & trans. David W. Wood (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), nos. 782, 1125: 143, 186.

²³ Cf. Beiser, *German Idealism*, 419.

demonstrating any relation to Zinzendorf. Alexander Hampton, in an excellent treatise on Platonism in the German Romantics, pivots from this mention of Zinzendorf to write of Spinozistic substance unity. This is not an insensible comparison *per se*, but the peculiarities of Zinzendorf's thought are thereby circumvented.²⁴ There is a tendency (with the marked exception of Crowe), then, to assimilate Christian influence in Novalis to Platonist or Spinozist tendencies. Margaret Mahony Stoljar, David W. Wood, and Beiser are comparable to Frank and Hampton in this regard; Wood writes of Novalis "reconcil[ing] Platonism with the deeper aspects of Christian spirituality", but makes no elaboration on such aspects.²⁵ Beiser, in *The Romantic Imperative*, claims "that the young romantics were, in fundamental respects, also heavily influenced by the Protestant tradition", but claims the opposite at every instance of Christianity's mention throughout the book, attributing influence instead to Platonic or "Classical" sources.²⁶ Indeed he claims, in his monumental *German Idealism*, that Novalis' "religious feelings" contradicted his "own critique" of systematic first principles.²⁷ Similarly, Bruce Donehower mentions Novalis' father's piety as influential on his son, but makes no elaboration beyond an inherited industriousness.²⁸ To my knowledge, in Anglophone historiography only Crowe substantiates the claim that "traditional Christianity" plays a major role in Novalis' thought – arguing for the pertinence of faith.²⁹

It is to be hoped that, in some small manner, this paper may begin to remedy the deficit of attention to Christianity in Novalis' thought, and more particularly that of his Moravian heritage.

3. Self and World

Novalis begins his philosophical writings with an extensive critique of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794). What emerges are embryonic forms of

²⁴ Benjamin Crowe, "On 'The Religion of the Visible Universe': Novalis and the Pantheism Controversy," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (April 2008): 128; Neubauer, *Bifocal Vision*, 152; Beiser, *German Idealism*, 419-420; Frank, *Foundations*, 161; Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism", 154. Alexander J. B. Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 194.

²⁵ Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. & trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (New York: SUNY Press, 1997), 2-4; Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, xxv.

²⁶ Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (London: Harvard University Press, 2003), 30, 34-36, 63-64, 95.

²⁷ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 417-418.

²⁸ Donehower, "Introduction," in *Birth of Novalis*, 17, 41.

²⁹ Crowe, "Visible Universe," 126, 131.

Novalis' concept of a higher self to be actualised, and how this is determined in nature. I lay out, in this section, Novalis' concepts of the pure I and the empirical I as he defines them in his *Fichte Studies*. I find that the empirical I consists of a *constructed* inner world which is, by Kantian judgment, related to the outer world of nature. The pure I is the *non-actual* undivided I; the empirical I is the *actual* I, constructed through dividing this pure I. Therefore, the pure I is in some sense approximated by the empirical I's construction. Section 4 will elaborate this, looking at Novalis' later extensions and clarifications of this groundwork. In his *Fichte Studien*, Novalis also outlines the nature of the absolute within which this takes place.

Novalis begins the *Fichte Studien* with a refutation of Fichte's absolute positing of the I. He therefore significantly breaks from Fichte in at least two ways: the self is not its own ground but is *in* "an absolute sphere of existence";³⁰ the self's identity, moreover, now unmoored from any absolute self, is thrown into question. The absolute which Novalis posits is God. God is the sphere of being: "God is absolute thesis, antithesis and synthesis"; "God is ground and world together."³¹ Here, he is echoing his understanding of Spinoza as garnered through Jacobi; Jacobi writes: Spinoza's God is "an immanent one, an indwelling cause of the world."³² Hence, the subject moves *within* the absolute, and therefore is neither outside nor within nature but alongside it.³³ However, in distinguishing God and nature he consciously distances himself from Spinoza; rather, Novalis draws a distinction between man, i.e. the subject, and nature (or *Not-I*), and the whole: "Spinoza ascended as far as nature – Fichte to the I, or the person. I [ascend] to the thesis God."³⁴ Nature and subject form the two constituents, interrelated halves of the whole. The whole, which is the absolute, and God, are equivalent terms.³⁵ This whole is comprised of nothing but the totality of determinate objects – all of which share the quality of being. What renders an object determinate is its relations to other objects.³⁶ Thus, "totality is only the completeness of relations", and "an I is of course only an [actual] I insofar as it is [related to] a not-I";³⁷ or, as Jacobi writes: "the one infinite substance

³⁰ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 3: 6.

³¹ Ibid. nos. 144, 425: 53, 135.

³² Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, "Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn (1789)," in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi: The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, (ed. & trans.) George di Giovanni (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 350.

³³ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 142: 53.

³⁴ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 151: 55.

³⁵ Ibid., nos. 8, 144, 151, 153: 7, 53-55.

³⁶ Ibid. nos. 444, 647: 139-140, 186-187.

³⁷ Ibid. nos. 651, 562: 190, 166. See also no. 659, 192.

of Spinoza has no determinate and complete existence on its own apart from individual things.”³⁸ Nassar rightly writes of Novalis’ absolute: “reality, as the common sphere of mediation, is nothing outside of the mediations. In turn, this sphere of mediation is the sphere of being.”³⁹

Insofar as we form relations to objects – thereby partaking in the whole – we therefore *become* and *are* God.⁴⁰ Furthermore, through determining ourselves within the whole by forming relations to nature, we reciprocally determine nature by this activity. Nevertheless, because the “totality [i.e. the whole] is only the completeness of relations,” one cannot relate oneself to it like one does to a singular object. Instead, we are *in* God – the sphere of being. However, the question remains as to the specific nature of the subject which is to be related, since Novalis has rejected Fichte’s absolute self.

Fichte’s divisible (higher) self seeks, ultimately, to *represent* the absolutely posited self, because it has already been posited; it is already *real*. Novalis, on the other hand, because he does not begin with the absolutely posited self, must *determine*, i.e. make *actual*. Novalis’ self begins with nothing: “the I is fundamentally nothing – everything must be given to it.”⁴¹ Fundamentally, Novalis’ subject is *in* God and seeks to *become* through forming relations to objects in nature. Since God is not an amoral being, this process of *gaining being* is couched in a moral philosophy which will be addressed in section 5.⁴² Importantly, all that is actual is in God, and the subject seeks to become absolutely actual, which would make them analogous to God: “a thing can have more or less being – Only the All is absolute.”⁴³ Novalis describes this process especially clearly in entry no. 647:

The determinate in the world of sense and the world of spirit – We must seek to create an inner world that is an actual pendant to the outer world – that, insofar as it is in direct opposition to [the outer world] at every point, constantly increases our freedom.... All determinations proceed outward from us – we create a world out of ourselves – and thereby become more and more free, since freedom is only thinkable in opposition to a world – The more we determine, the more we lay out what is in us – the freer – more substantial – we become – we set aside, as it were, more and more that which is inessential and approach the

³⁸ Jacobi, “Letters,” 353, 355.

³⁹ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 29-30.

⁴⁰ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, nos. 1, 454 : 4-5, 145. See also Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 320: 47.

⁴¹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 568: 171.

⁴² See also Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 63: 10.

⁴³ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 454: 145.

thoroughly pure, simple essence of our I. Our (creative) power gets as much free play as it has world under it.⁴⁴

Thus, the subject is determined by the relating of the inner world to the outer “at every [individual] point.” This “outer world” is nature, and “the inner world” is the indeterminate subject, both of which “are set up in opposition to each other *in* the whole.”⁴⁵ By relating these two worlds the subject acquires the relations to objects which render the subject “more substantial”, i.e. *actual*. Here Novalis implies that the outer world is the sphere of non-intelligible matter, i.e. nature, to which the subject has no determinate relation, and the inner world is the sphere of spiritual ideal identity – respectively “the world of sense and the world of spirit.” This would mean that, in the statement “I am a student”, that the identity of “student(ness)” is of my inner world and thereafter related to the sense data, or mere *stuff*, of “student(ness)” in the outer world; I have gained substantial identity because I am related to the (outer) world. I have given *meaning* to a part of nature and simultaneously related myself thereunto. Importantly, Novalis’ subject *constructs* – with “our (creative) power” – its inner world’s parts, like “student(ness)”, which means that this process of relating inner and outer is active. This *construction* is best understood in relation to Fichte’s “productive imagination”, as has been demonstrated by Cahen-Maurel.⁴⁶

Novalis elsewhere retains this distinction of inner and outer as, respectively, ideal identity and unintelligible *stuff*, especially in entries nos. 225 to 233, which discuss the relation of spirit and matter:⁴⁷

The materials of empirical spirit are reason (ideas) and understanding (concepts). The materials of empirical matter – [are] elements and drives. The thought possibilities of this are contained in the materials of pure spirit and pure matter.⁴⁸

The first sentence supports this conception of the inner world’s “empirical spirit” containing ideal identity. In claiming that the subject creates the identity of the objects to which it relates, i.e. as its inner world, Novalis is making a Kantian point: “from where do I borrow my concepts? – necessarily I – necessarily from myself.”⁴⁹ Thus, the identity of an object to which the I

⁴⁴ Ibid. no. 647: 186.

⁴⁵ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 653: 191.

⁴⁶ Cahen-Maurel, “Novalis’s Magical Idealism,” 133-152.

⁴⁷ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, nos. 225-233: 68-74.

⁴⁸ Ibid. no. 232: 73.

⁴⁹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 567: 168; see also nos. 373, 541: 130, 161.

is related originates within the I, but its matter, or *stuff*, is from the outer world.

The inner world, however, belongs to the empirical I and it is derived from the pure I, which contains its “thought possibilities.” This distinction, found in no. 232 above, corresponds to the subject’s “approach [to] the thoroughly *pure*, simple essence of our I.” In entry no. 32, the empirical I appears to be the *actual* I: “The I must be divided in order to be an I – only the drive to be an I unifies it – the undetermined ideal of the pure I is thus characteristic of the I in general.”⁵⁰ “The drive to be an I” corresponds to “the materials of empirical matter” in no. 232. Put alongside no. 647, the divided I presented here would seem to be the constructed inner world which is determinately related, as “an actual pendant”, to the divided *not-I*. In short, the divided I is the subject insofar as it is related to nature, the *not-I*. Moreover, the opposition between the pure and the empirical can explain why Novalis writes that division is necessary “in order to be an I.” The undivided I, simply put, is the “pure I”, which is thus not an *actual* I. Rather, the “substantial” I (which is the divided I) is *constructed from* the “pure I” which contains “the thought possibilities of this”; hence, “we create a world out of ourselves.” In short, only insofar as I relate myself to individual objects in the outer world of *not-I*, the identity of which I construct, am I real; that is, my pure I becomes empirical. Entry no. 568 is a good summary of this:

The I is fundamentally nothing – everything must be given to it – But something can only be given to it and the given only becomes something through the I... the I is nothing but the principle of approximation. Everything that steps into its sphere belongs to it – because the essence of its being consists in this conversion to its own use. Appropriation is the original activity of its nature.⁵¹

Or again, no. 562: “I is only thinkable through a not-I. An I is of course only an I insofar as it is a not-I – for the rest, it could be what it wants – only it would not be an I.”⁵² Whilst considered to be divided, i.e. constituted of a plurality of parts, the empirical I should be seen also as a construction, because the ‘pure I’ is “fundamentally nothing.” The objects to “be given to it” are through the mingling of the inner and outer worlds’ facets; hence, following entry no. 647, the I becomes more substantial in proportion to how much “it has world under it.” By no. 562, it is only substantial “insofar as it

⁵⁰ Ibid. no. 32: 25.

⁵¹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 568: 171.

⁵² Ibid. no. 562: 166.

is a not-I”, i.e., an empirical I, *qua* inner world, related to the outer world, *qua* ‘not-I’.

Resulting from this, the “pure I” receives its identity indirectly, through something being posited in the empirical I’s inner world in opposition to the outer.⁵³ Hence, the pure I is “the principle of approximation” and its identity consists in “appropriation.”⁵⁴ In other words, the “pure I” is “approximated” in every singular relation between the inner world and the outer world; however, the “pure I” only gains being through the totality of these judgments, because it is itself nothing *actual*. Put simply, in saying “I am a student” and “I play tennis”, I am determinately relating myself to two real objects, which as relations constitute two facets of my empirical I, i.e., my inner world’s relations to the outer; likewise, I am approximating my (pure) “I” for which I have a feeling, but also providing it with identity. After all, I would not claim that “tennis” and “student(ness)” are my whole identity, but importantly they are, herein, the only determined, i.e., empirically *actual*, parts of me. Self-consciousness, therefore, parallels *being*, and thus substantiality and the *known* empirical I are equivalent: “We ourselves only are insofar as we know ourselves.”⁵⁵ Therefore, with every relation I “approach the thoroughly pure, simple essence of our [my] I.”⁵⁶ Novalis describes this undetermined “pure I” in the following way: “What I don’t know but feel (the I feels itself, as content) I believe.”⁵⁷ In short, because it is indeterminate, it can only be an object of feeling and belief.

The exact nature of the “pure I” in the *Fichte Studies* remains ambiguous, but the nature of this distinction is elaborated in Novalis’ later works, which themselves illuminate other more cryptic parts of the *Fichte Studies*. What is clear enough from the *Fichte Studies* is the importance of constructing an inner world and relating it to the outer in order to become substantial; moreover, the pure I is both clearly distinct from the empirical I but also prior to it. Here, how exactly these two selves relate is obscure, and what it means to approximate the pure I is unclear, but Novalis retains these fundamental distinctions in later writings.

⁵³ See also *Ibid.*, no. 1: 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* no. 568: 171.

⁵⁵ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 454: 145.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* no. 647: 187.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* no. 1: 4.

4. Marriage to the Higher Self

For Novalis, the “pure I” comes to play a role strongly analogous to Fichte’s “higher self”. He comes to understand it, as I will demonstrate, as the empirical I’s ideal object of marital love; this relationship is the basis for the empirical I’s existential development in the world. This development is an existential application of artistic genius, which also, as a kind of by-product, approximates this higher self through each relating judgment. Reciprocally, this activity of determining the empirical I, and approximating the higher self, determines nature into an aesthetic *work of art*. Essentially, however, Novalis elaborates his philosophy as laid out in the *Fichte Studien. Logologische Fragmente I*, no. 20, lucidly elaborates the function and nature of the quasi-personal relationship between the higher self and empirical I:

There are certain poetic works within us that have quite a different character from the others, for they are accompanied by a sense of necessity, and yet there exists simply no other external reason for them. A person believes he is involved in a conversation, and some kind of unknown, spiritual being in a miraculous way causes him to think the most obvious thoughts. This being must be a higher being, because it communicates with him in a way that is not possible for any being which is bound to appearances.... This higher kind of self has the same relation to the human being as the human being has to nature or the wise man to the child. The human being yearns to be the equal of this being in the same way as he seeks to make himself the equal of the nonself.⁵⁸

This excerpt seems to be discussing the “pure I” of section 3 as a higher self which the subject “feels”, and seeks to progressively realise.⁵⁹ The empirical I, i.e. the *actual* I, seeks to further construct its inner world and thereby become “the equal of the nonself [i.e. nature]”, whilst also becoming “the equal of this being” – the “pure I” it “feels”. Accordingly, Novalis writes: “Doing philosophy is a conversation with oneself of the above kind – an actual revelation of the self – arousal of the real self through the ideal self.”⁶⁰

Evident here is the *non-actual* nature of the higher self, here “the ideal self”, as opposed to “the human being” of no. 20 which is the *actual* empirical I – hence the opposition between “real” and “ideal self.” Reiterated, however, is the *relationship* between these two selves as being of acute importance for the “arousal of the real self”: that which “causes him to think the most obvious thoughts.” Indeed, the analogy is one of a human relationship, albeit

⁵⁸ Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” in *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, no. 20: 52-53.

⁵⁹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, nos. 1, 647: 4, 186-187.

⁶⁰ Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 21: 53.

with a kind of *othered* ideal self. Considering the implication in no. 20 that this higher self plays an integral role in the formation of “certain poetic works within us”, it seems fruitful to explore Novalis’ concept of the personal “god” of art and poetry in the *Fichte Studies*.

Art and poetry, for Novalis, are existential enterprises; the subject’s active determination of itself in nature is artistic activity: “the voice accompanying our developing self.”⁶¹ Each poem, however, has “its own world, its own god”, and, as he writes elsewhere, “Art is: the cultivation of our causal influence – a certain sort of wanting – according to an idea.”⁶² Highly suggestively, he writes:

Our I is genus and individual – universal and particular.... The individual form remains only for the whole, insofar as it became a universal.... What you really love remains with you.... We are, we live, we believe in God, because this is the personified genus.... All reverence endures forever – all truth – everything personal.⁶³

Lastly, Novalis writes: “Where a person places his reality, what he fixes upon, that is his god, his world, his everything. Relativity of morality. / Love /.”⁶⁴

A consistent reading of this, considering *Logological Fragments I* nos. 20 and 21, is that the higher self and the ideal self are equivalent to this *personal* “god”. Since art and poetry are processes whereby the self becomes *actual* and determinate – reiterated in entries nos. 435, 521, 639, and 651 – the fact that each poem has “its own god” and art is made “according to an idea” suggests a paralleling to nos. 20 and 21.⁶⁵ Just as the real self is aroused through the ideal self, to which it has an intimate relation, so art follows “according to an idea”, and likewise poetry follows a “god”. The implication, reading entries nos. 462 and 396 alongside each other, is that the real self has an intimate relation of “love” to a “god” which is, like the higher self, “his”.

Furthermore, just as the relationship in fragment no. 20 had a causative effect upon the real self – i.e. the causing of “thoughts”, and the “arousal” of no. 21 – so entry no. 462 suggests that the relationship of love is crucial for the making *actual* of the self: “What you really love remains with you.” Only insofar as the relations of the inner-outer world correspond to the “genus”, i.e. the higher self, do they remain. Likewise, the “wanting – according to an

⁶¹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 435, 135-136. See also *Ibid.*, no. 521: 159, and Novalis, “The Poet’s Realm,” in *Birth of Novalis*, 60.

⁶² Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, nos. 414, 639: 134, 183.

⁶³ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 462: 147.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* no. 396, 132.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* nos. 435, 521, 639, 651: 135-136, 159, 183, 189-190.

idea” is simply the self’s “appropriation” of objects to further realise “the [pure] I [which] is nothing but the principle of approximation.”⁶⁶ Furthering this reading, Novalis writes:

We seek the design for the world – we are this design ourselves. What are we? Personified all-powerful points. But the execution, as the image of the design, must also be equal to it in free activity and self-reference – and vice versa.... Only in so far then as the human being lives a happily married life with himself... is he capable of marriage and family at all. Act of embracing oneself.

One must never confess to oneself that one loves oneself.... The first kiss in this understanding is the principle of philosophy – the origin of a new world – the beginning of absolute chronology – the completion of an infinitely growing bond with the self.⁶⁷

The “human being” is, following nos. 20 and 21, the “real self”; therefore, the self to which he is to be “married” is the higher self, whence comes the ideal “design for the world.” Accordingly, the union of love thereunto – “the first kiss” – is “the origin of a new world.” Likewise, it seems plausible to read the subject’s capacity for “marriage and family at all”, garnered through this union, as a rendition of the “real self” gaining being through its relationship to the higher self. Lastly, the “personified all-powerful points” contrasted with the “human being” seem to refer to the fact, in no. 462, that man is both genus and individual. Considering entry no. 396, if we understand the personal “god” to be the ideal higher self; alongside entry no. 462, that “God... is the personified genus”; and *Logological Fragments II* no. 27, that “God wants there to be gods”;⁶⁸ then, put together, each person’s “god” is their own “personified genus” – here rendered, in the plural, as “personified all-powerful points” – as opposed to the absolute, God, *the* (singular) personified genus.

Art and poetry, then, are the process described in no. 647, whereby “we create a world out of ourselves” and become “freer – more substantial”;⁶⁹ except the “pure, simple essence of our I” which this world is built to realise is, properly speaking, the higher self: “his god, his world, his everything.”⁷⁰ Or, more properly, this world comes *from* the higher self, since “we are this

⁶⁶ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, nos. 639, 568: 183, 171.

⁶⁷ Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 55: 58-59.

⁶⁸ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, nos. 396, 462: 132, 147; Novalis, “Logological Fragments II,” in *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, no. 27: 76.

⁶⁹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 647: 186.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* no. 396: 132.

design ourselves”, and is dependent upon a “happily married life” between the real self and the higher self. The higher self, to harken back to entry no. 232, contains the “possibilities” of the inner world’s “empirical spirit”, and in this sense the world comes *from* it.⁷¹ Thus, the empirical I seeks to be the equal of both the higher self and the *not-I*, i.e. realise the higher self as well as relate itself to the outer world – each through the progressive construction of an inner world.⁷²

Analogous to Kant’s genius,⁷³ Novalis’ subject gives the law as a part of its artistic creation and determination of the inner world: “positing [*setzen*] is the verb of *Gesetz* [law]. Law is [the] property of activity.”⁷⁴ Novalis’ artistic activity is thus “free rule – victory over raw nature in every word.”⁷⁵ It is, however, always governed by “the idea of a whole” – each poem’s “own world, its own god”, the higher self.⁷⁶ Novalis’ subject thereby *becomes* through artistically realising itself in the world, and, reciprocally, determines “raw nature”. The result of this is that, following entry no. 647’s expression of the subject’s “free play” seeking to gain “world under it”:⁷⁷ “the more positive we become, the more negative will the world around us become – until at last there will be no more negation – but instead we are all in all. / God wants there to be gods.”⁷⁸

This is the goal of realising one’s higher self in the world, and thereby becoming fully *actual*, i.e. “positive” – using and transforming the (outer) world as material – as the “negative” to ourselves. Magic, or “Magical Idealism”, is Novalis’ expression for this artistic process: the construction of an inner world and the forming of relations between it and the outer, resulting in a determined self and the transformation of nature.⁷⁹

Beiser understands this process as Magical Idealism’s formation of “the world into a work of art.”⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Beiser is wrong to consider this process as definitively non-Fichtean; the root of his error seems to be that, despite his claim that Novalis is substantially influenced by Fichte, he fails to

⁷¹ Ibid. no. 232: 73.

⁷² Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 20: 53.

⁷³ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), no. 50: 188-189.

⁷⁴ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 444: 140.

⁷⁵ Ibid. no. 435: 152. See also Ibid., nos. 485, 588: 152, 176.

⁷⁶ Ibid. nos. 587, 414: 176, 134.

⁷⁷ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 647: 186.

⁷⁸ Novalis, “Logological Fragments II,” no. 27: 76.

⁷⁹ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 338: 51.

⁸⁰ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 424.

note the importance of Fichte's higher self.⁸¹ Whilst articulating Novalis' goal of constructing an inner world as a pendant to the outer, he misses the entailed goal of the inner world progressively approximating the higher self. Nos. 601 and 603 in his *Encyclopaedia* illuminate this:

The ego believes it sees a foreign being – through the latter's approximation there arises another intermediate being – the product – which belongs to the ego, yet also doesn't seem to belong to the ego.⁸²

Supposition of the ideal – of that which is sought – is the method to find it.... As a attempts to determine b – it determines itself – and by determining itself, it determines b. Indirect construction of the intention.⁸³

Leaving aside, for the moment, the fact that the ideal self is found through “supposition”, these excerpts demonstrate that the real self's goal of realising its higher self results in the furtherance of the real self's substantiality alongside an “approximation” of the higher self, i.e. this “foreign being”, in “the [singular] product.”

For Nassar, the subject aims “to [progressively] realize the moral (higher) self in the world” – explicitly the Fichtean higher self.⁸⁴ Because the subject and nature are both within the absolute – “the common sphere of mediation”⁸⁵ – this activity results in the moral transformation of both nature *and* the self.⁸⁶ Here I completely agree with Nassar. To explain, however, how the approximative determination of the higher self “is nothing other than the attempt to bring the divine into the world”⁸⁷, greater attention must be paid to Novalis' concepts of faith and love, which appear to come together in marriage to Christ, through the higher self.

5. Christ and Sophie

Love functions firstly as the motive force for the construction of the inner world, i.e. the “arousal” of the real self through the ideal; secondly, love is the divine essence which renders the subject's substantial determinations imperishable: “what you really love remains with you.”⁸⁸ The operation of

⁸¹ Ibid., 420, 424.

⁸² Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 601: 106.

⁸³ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 603: 107.

⁸⁴ Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute*, 39, 66.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 29-30.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 66-67.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁸⁸ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 462: 147.

this second function of love in Novalis may be understood in relation to his Moravian heritage.

This divine essence appears to become present within the subject through its higher self mediating Christ as a kind of spiritual presence. The subject's mediated marriage to Christ, through the higher self, entails that their activity determines Christ in the world *qua* their higher self being approximated by their empirical self; this has eschatological consequences. The ideal higher self is itself an external love-object (beloved) which has been internally idealised by faith. Christ is spiritually mediated, *through* this inner ideal. Christ's inner mediation and the subject's own substantial existence are consequently dependent on faith. Novalis exhibits this process regarding his own deceased fiancée, Sophie, whom he makes such an object through faith; Christ is present for Novalis *through* his idea of her. This marriage to Christ and the Christological significance of a human beloved is explicable in relation to Zinzendorf's *Ehereligion*.

Daub has demonstrated that marital love unto the higher self causes the subject to *perceive* itself "everywhere", and thus that "love [actively] constitutes a world of correspondences."⁸⁹ Daub pivots from Novalis' *Glauben und Liebe*, entry no. 4:

What one loves one finds everywhere and sees similarities to it everywhere. The greater the love the wider and more varied the resembling world. My beloved is the abbreviation of the universe, the universe the elongation of my beloved.⁹⁰

Combining this with that fact that the real self is married to the higher self,⁹¹ Daub concludes that that which is found "everywhere" is indeed "nothing other than the poetic projection of our own transcendental self"; accordingly, this self-love "turns into abandonment of the self for an other – egoism becomes a source of a love relation with the other."⁹²

Described in the framework I have laid out, the world which is created by the subject to realise its higher self is generated through the marital relation of love unto the higher self. Love stimulates the subject to associate a whole world with their "beloved", i.e. their ideal higher self – potentially the *idea* of a human beloved – and thence to construct this inner world to realise this idea. Hence, "of a lovable object we cannot hear, we cannot speak,

⁸⁹ Daub, *Uncivil Unions*, 116.

⁹⁰ Novalis, "Faith and Love," in *Political Writings*, no. 4: 35-36; Daub, *Uncivil Unions*, 116.

⁹¹ Novalis, "Logological Fragments I," no. 55: 58-59.

⁹² Daub, *Uncivil Unions*, 119.

enough”⁹³; but the *speaking*, as opposed to the love which causes us to speak, is our own doing. Therefore, “love popularises the personality”, because⁹⁴: “Once we understand how to love One thing, we will also know best how to love everything.”⁹⁵ This would explain why Novalis cryptically writes that “love is the basis for the possibility of magic.”⁹⁶ The higher self is the stimulus to magic, which also means it stimulates its own approximation.

Nevertheless, love is not only a generator of self-development, but also, as the rest of this paper bears out, the divine essence: it is requisite for being. Hence, not only does the subject *become* through love *qua* motive force, but it only remains insofar as it *is* love, i.e. is divine. Novalis’ eschatology contextualises this. A particularly lucid expression of this can be found in fragment no. 27, from his *Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies*:

Perfect life is heaven. The world is the totality of imperfect life.... perfect life is the substance – the world is the totality of its accidents. What we here designate as death is a consequence of absolute life, of heaven – hence the incessant annihilation of imperfect life.... The goal of our life is the exercise of virtue.... Everything will become heaven.... The world is the sphere of the imperfect unions of the spirit and Nature. Their perfect indifferentiation forms the moral being par excellence – God. The essence of God consists in incessant moralization.... God makes the world moral – unites life or heaven and spirit. 1. Everything shall become heaven – 2. everything shall become spirit – 3. and everything shall become virtue. No. 3 is the synthesis of 1 and 2.⁹⁷

God, then, is destroying all that is immoral in order to produce a new world of “perfect life” which appears equivalent to “moral” life and a life of “virtue.” “Heaven”, or this perfect world, is created by the “unions of the spirit and Nature.” Moreover, this new world *is* God, since this union “forms” Him. The implication is that insofar as the subject exercises “virtue” they *become* God and participate in this moral-eschatological process.⁹⁸ This becomes clearer when examining precisely what God’s spirit is.

The *Fichte Studies* provide sketches of God as trinitarian. This is vital evidence of Novalis’ Christian understanding of the absolute. Entry no. 159 reads:

⁹³ Novalis, “Pollen,” in *Political Writings*, no. 41: 16.

⁹⁴ Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 55: 58-59.

⁹⁵ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 723: 134.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 79: 13.

⁹⁷ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (Appendix): *Extracts from the Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies* (1798/1799), no. 27: 197-198.

⁹⁸ E.g. Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, nos. 60, 61: 9-10.

God is three without being One – and indeed, he begins with the presentation of thesis and ends with the antithesis. Father, spirit and son. The son is pure personality. Jesus. / Spirit of synthesis – creating power, creator of nature.... Triune God / Spinozist God / Personal God.⁹⁹

A reading of this, which is consistent with entry no. 167, is that God creates a world through His spirit but that this spirit in some sense creates in accordance with Jesus, the “pure personality”: “the spirit is creative power. The Son is pictorial power – matter – form.”¹⁰⁰ Shedding light on this, Novalis writes: “God could create the world only according to an idea, consequently only through mediated creation.”¹⁰¹ Finally, he writes:

There is a World-Spirit, just as there is a World-Soul.... The world is not yet complete – as little as the World-Spirit – Out of One God there will arise a Universal-God. Out of One world – a Universe.... Yet the spirit is formed through the soul – for the soul is nothing more than tethered, arrested, harmonized spirit.¹⁰²

The inference which I make is that Jesus is this idea, which is also to consider him as the “world-soul”, whence derives the creating “world-spirit” that renews the present world; moreover, the coming “Universal-God” which is identified with a coming “Universe” can be read alongside the *Freiburg* fragment above, that God is heaven. Furthermore, Novalis writes that “spirit and person are one”, which dovetails nicely with his description of Jesus as God’s “personality.”¹⁰³

Novalis’ description of God as *becoming actual* in the world through the going out of His spirit, according to an inner ideal, is analogous to how Novalis’ subject *becomes* in the world¹⁰⁴; there is a higher self and a spiritual inner world thence derived which determines the subject *in* the world, and reciprocally *modifies* nature. This affiliation is metaphysical, because Novalis’ subject’s approximation of their own higher self *further*s this eschatological process, hence: the “development of the [subject’s] spirit is a codevelopment of the World-Spirit” and the “development of the [subject’s] soul is therefore a codevelopment of the World-Soul.”¹⁰⁵ He makes this conjunction, it would seem, by positing the higher self of each person as *mediating* Christ’s spirit,

⁹⁹ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, no. 159: 57.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 167: 59.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, no. 604: 178.

¹⁰² Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 407: 63.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, no. 63: 10.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 72: 62; Novalis, “The Poet’s Realm,” 60.

¹⁰⁵ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 407: 63.

Who makes the subject *holy*. Following this, Novalis' subject's communion of marital love unto the higher self is best understood as an example of Zinzendorfic marriage-duality: unto higher self and Christ. Nevertheless, because the higher self is not derivative from any absolutely posited self, it must be drawn from without. This is the role of faith.

Novalis chooses his dead fiancée, Sophie, to be his higher self – his “soul” – by an act of faith.¹⁰⁶ His attempted feat is the transference of the thought of her into a stable, inner ideal object – i.e. his higher self. He variously expresses this attempted construction in his journal of 1797 as his attempt to feel her with “inwardness”, and desire to “live more fully in her. Only in her memory am I truly well.”¹⁰⁷ This construction is dependent upon faith:

All knowledge ends and begins in faith. The forward and backward extension of knowledge is an enlargement / – an extension of the province of faith. The ego believes it sees a foreign being....¹⁰⁸

If a person suddenly and genuinely believed... Supposition of the ideal – of that which is sought – is the method to find it.... As a attempts to determine b.... By believing that my little Sophie is around me and can appear to me, and by acting in accordance with this belief, then she is indeed around me – and finally appears certain to me – precisely there, where I least expect – Within me – as my soul perhaps etc.¹⁰⁹

Faith then, it would seem, makes present the chosen beloved as one's higher self. Given the fundamental necessity of possessing a higher self, Novalis makes no exaggeration in writing that “all knowledge ends and begins in faith.” Indeed, he writes elsewhere: “the whole world has come into being out of the power of faith – it is the synthetic principle.”¹¹⁰ This is because, as shown in sections 3 and 4, the subject is dependent upon the higher self, the “personal god”, to *become substantial*. Accordingly, “life is a moral principle. (Imperfect morality – imperfect life)”; those lacking faith and thus a moral higher self will also lack its entailed substantial realization of “life” in the world, but will instead be destroyed by God's “incessant annihilation of imperfect life.”¹¹¹ One can thus make sense of Novalis' striking claim: “few

¹⁰⁶ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 603: 107.

¹⁰⁷ Novalis, “Journal, April 18th-July 6th, 1797,” in *Birth of Novalis*, 79-96, esp. 80, 81, 83, 87, 92, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 601: 106.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* no. 603: 107.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* nos. 512, 779, 852: 91-92, 143, 155.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 255, 852: 38, 155; *Ibid.* (Appendix): *Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies*, no. 27: 197-198.

human beings are human beings.”¹¹² The higher self’s determinate realization is moral, imperishable substance, because the higher self mediates the divine essence.¹¹³ Faith is thus prerequisite to substantial existence whereby we *are* God.

Novalis’ letter to Caroline Just of March, 1797, provides an early example of the higher self’s double character, namely, God’s presence *through* Sophie:

What you tell me about Sophie’s invisible presence is a brilliant truth – her image should and must become my better self – the magic image that is illumined deep inside me by an eternal lamp and which will certainly save me from so many trials and temptations of evil and sin.¹¹⁴

This is a particularly revealing letter because so much of what is significant about Novalis’ higher self is brought out. Sophie becomes Novalis’ higher self by his effort (of faith): “her image should and must become my better self.” Moreover, the fact that her image is “magic” seems a clear allusion to the fact that a world is to be constituted out of her, in the first sense of love as a generator, i.e. of love unto Sophie as the stimulus to magical idealism. The second sense of love, however, also seems present, because there is an “eternal lamp” which causes her to be “illumined deep inside” and gives her salvific power against “evil and sin.”

Corroborating my interpretation of this letter, Novalis writes: “hence it is a duty to think of the dead [such as Sophie]. It is the only way to remain in communion with them. In no other way is God himself present for us than through faith.”¹¹⁵ Here the concept of God becoming “present for us through faith” *through* the *thought* of someone else is evident.

Blüthenstaub no. 74 contextualises this. Every person must freely choose a “mediator” which “binds us to the divine”, lest he practice “irreligion”, but Novalis “makes the monotheistic mediator the mediator of the mediating world of pantheism, centring the world on him”; hence, whilst “to the religious person every object can be a temple... the spirit of this temple is... the monotheistic mediator”, i.e. Christ, the “him” on Whom the world *centres* and by Whom God is known (viz. “the monotheistic mediator”, e.g.

¹¹² Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 762: 140.

¹¹³ See also *Ibid.*, nos. 118, 320: 20, 47; Novalis, “Pollen,” no. 83: 26.

¹¹⁴ Novalis, “Friedrich von Hardenberg to Caroline Just in Tennstedt: Weissenfels, March 24, 1797,” in *Birth of Novalis*, 71.

¹¹⁵ Novalis, “Pollen,” no. 34: 15-16. See also Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 779: 143-144, and Novalis, *Hymns to the Night and Spiritual Songs*, trans. George MacDonald (Forest Row: Temple Lodge Publishing, 1992), hymn no. 5: 17.

Colossians 1:15-20): the “pure personality.”¹¹⁶ Novalis is seemingly claiming that the subject has Christ mediated to them through another object, i.e. “temple.”¹¹⁷ I infer that this is a discussion of the higher self, and hence that Christ is the “eternal lamp” illuminating the inner Sophie: “the spirit of this temple.” Here Zinzendorf’s *Ehereligion* is most fruitful to consider.

Reading Novalis’ higher self in relation to Zinzendorf, the Christologically mediating status of the marital higher self dovetails Zinzendorf’s spouse-and-Christ marital dualism. Following this reading, Novalis synthesises Zinzendorf’s notion of a spectral vision of Christ through the “Eyes of Faith” with the effort of faith in making the chosen beloved into an inner idea (viz. a higher self). Hence, for Novalis, his marital higher self, Sophie, appears to him in a spectral vision - suggestively involving “faith”, perhaps because she is only thereby united with him - but it is Christ who “shines” *through* her. This is, I think, the content of Novalis’ famous *Hymn* no. 3, when through Christ’s spirit – “Thou, soul of the Night, heavenly Slumber, didst come upon me” – he sees the transfigured Sophie: “the glorified face of my beloved. In her eyes eternity reposed”; the text closes with him “welcoming the new life” and affirming his “unchangeable faith in the heaven of the Night, and its sun, the Beloved.” It appears that “*the Beloved*” is in fact Christ, as contrasted with “*my beloved*”, which is Sophie.¹¹⁸ This reading seems the most plausible given that Christ is here described in language which is, I think, strongly reminiscent of the language of Christ as the world-soul *by which* heaven, which is the Night, is created.¹¹⁹ He is the “soul of the Night” or, what appears equivalent, “its sun.” Accordingly, Novalis’ faith, at the closure of *Hymn* no. 3, is directed to Christ.¹²⁰

This Zinzendorfic *vision* of Sophie is poignantly echoed, definitively as his higher self, in his letter to Caroline Just, as well as in his journal entries, especially that of June, 29th, 1797: “always have dear Sophie in front of your eyes”, closing with, on its own line, the words “Christ and Sophie.”¹²¹

Zinzendorf’s theology, on the strength of making the believer *married* to Christ, entails a Christological aspect to the human spouse as well as a marital devotion to Christ *per se*. This latter aspect is synthesised with a *blood and*

¹¹⁶ Novalis, “Pollen,” no. 74: 20-23.

¹¹⁷ See Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 55: 58-59.

¹¹⁸ Novalis, *Hymns*, hymn no. 3: 12. My emphases.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, hymn no. 4: 13-15.

¹²⁰ See also *Ibid.*, hymn no. 5, 17; Novalis, “Pollen,” no. 34: 15-16; Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 779: 143-144.

¹²¹ Novalis, “Hardenberg to Just: March 24th, 1797,” 71; Novalis, “Journal, 1797,” 96, see also 80, 81, 83, 87, 92.

wounds theology, whereby marital and sanguine language mingle. Novalis appears to follow this imagery in *Song* no. 7:

In heavenly blood / Swims the blissful two. / Oh that the ocean / Were even now flushing! / And in odorous flesh / The rock upswelling! / ...Never close enough, never enough its own, / Can it *have* the beloved! / By ever tenderer lips... Then had they known Love's / Infinite fullness, / And commended the sustenance / Of body and blood.¹²²

Christ, then, is *the beloved*, as in *hymn* no. 3, and the marital (almost erotic) language of “never close enough, never enough its own, / Can it *have* the beloved” dovetails the mediating marriage to Sophie, also of *hymn* no. 3. *Hymn* no. 2 echoes this dual marriage: “True as wife's his heart for ever holdeth.”¹²³ Consequent to the higher self mediating Christ, if my reading is accurate, Novalis writes:

I would find my meaning, or body, determined partly by itself and partly by the idea of the whole – by its spirit – the world soul, and this so that both are inextricably united – so that properly speaking one could refer neither to the one nor the other exclusively. My body would seem to me not specifically different from the whole – but only a variant of it. My knowledge of the whole would thus have the character of analogy.... My body is a small whole, and thus it also has a special soul; for I call soul the individual principle whereby everything becomes one whole.¹²⁴

God and the subject indeed seem metaphysically analogous; furthermore, because the subject's “soul”, or higher self, mediates Christ, “the world soul”, the activity of the subject determines both the divine *and* the subject, in the world, towards an eschatologically completed “whole.” A starkest instance of this dual determination is in *Hymn* no. 4. Holy living in this imperfect world, the realm of Light, determines Christ, and thus is *of* Him, the sleeping Soul of the Night – i.e. the idea, or world-soul, of the coming world:

Afloat above [in the realm of Light] remains what is earthly, and is swept back in storms; but what became holy by the touch of Love, runs free through hidden ways to the region beyond, where, like odours, it mingles with Love asleep.¹²⁵

¹²² Novalis, *Hymns*, song no. 7: 39-40.

¹²³ Novalis, *Hymns*, song no. 2: 30.

¹²⁴ Novalis, “Logological Fragments I,” no. 72: 62.

¹²⁵ Novalis, *Hymns*, hymn no. 4: 13; see also Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 407: 63.

Christ is here referred to simply as “Love”, and this is repeated across the *Hymnen an die Nacht*, albeit most clearly in *Hymn* no. 1 which describes Mary as “the foster-mother of blissful love.”¹²⁶ This corresponds to Novalis’ interpretation of 1 John 4:8: “God is love. Love is the highest reality – the primal foundation.”¹²⁷ Hence, self-actualisation moralises the world by transforming it into love. Novalis therefore writes: “Love is the final goal of world history – the One of the universe”¹²⁸; and, equally, “Love is the ego – the ideal of every endeavor.”¹²⁹

6. Conclusion

Novalis is expressing the biblical view, which Zinzendorf shared, that the believer is *like* Christ in their own life: “Holy in him”, writes Novalis, we “knew ourselves akin to God.”¹³⁰ This is perhaps best expressed in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”, *through my higher self*, Novalis would add. The immediate conceptual significance of this holiness is that Novalis’ “dawn of humanity” and his Christian millenarianism occur in tandem; respectively, one might describe this as the eschatological fulfilment of the real self’s striving to be the equal of the *Not-I* as well as its striving to realise the divinely mediating higher self.¹³¹ Therefore, the returned Christ is “the inner reception of a new messiah in all his thousand forms”, or again: “He will be visible to the believer in countless forms.”¹³² He comes “in countless forms” because Christ is only fully *determined* through the completed plenitude of determinations which each approximate the higher self: “God... [only appears] in a thousand, diverse forms – God only appears as a whole pantheistically.”¹³³ Pauline Kleingeld, not appreciating the Christian aspects to Novalis’ thought, only sees his *Christianity or Europe* as concerned with “the culmination” of the “Cosmopolitan ideal... of *Bildung*” – i.e. an essentially secular eschatology.¹³⁴ It seems far more plausible, given especially its discussion of this messiah, to read the text alongside the *Hymns*; consequently, the millennium is the

¹²⁶ Novalis, *Hymns*, hymn no. 1, 10; see also *Ibid.*, hymn no. 5: 20-21.

¹²⁷ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 79: 12.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 50: 8.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 835: 153.

¹³⁰ Novalis, *Hymns*, song no. 1, 28-29; Zinzendorf, *Discourses*, iii, 12-13, 20, 35, 41-42, 61, 83-84, 119-121, 132, 174.

¹³¹ Novalis, “Christianity or Europe,” 74.

¹³² Novalis, “Christianity or Europe,” 74.

¹³³ Novalis, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, no. 398: 61.

¹³⁴ Pauline Kleingeld, “Romantic Cosmopolitanism: Novalis’s ‘Christianity or Europe’”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46, no. 2 (April 2008), 282.

heaven of the Night – the eschatologically completed sum of individuals’
“touch[es] of love.”¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Novalis, *Hymns*, hymn no. 4: 13.

Symphilosophie

Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica

Per Fichte. Ai Tedeschi

(1799)

Friedrich Schlegel

Introduzione e traduzione di Maurizio Maria Malimpensa*

Com'è arcinoto, il breve – quanto straordinariamente ricco e imprescindibile per la comprensione della successiva storia della cultura e della filosofia – periodo di insegnamento di Fichte presso l'Università di Jena si concluse nel modo più turbolento possibile, e cioè con il celebre *Atheismusstreit*¹. Dopo essere sceso nell'agone filosofico offrendo a un pubblico quanto mai bramoso di novità la tanto attesa *critica della rivelazione* – benignamente accolta dallo stesso Kant, che a seguito dell'accidentale assenza del nome dell'autore nella prima edizione², ne lo annunciava ai lettori, quasi sancendo, suo malgrado, la legittimità per il giovane esordiente a vantare il titolo di erede

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¹ Per un quadro esaustivo della disputa e del contesto storico in cui essa sorse, ed un facile accesso ai principali scritti che l'animarono, a partire dalle due *Abhandlungen* di Fichte e Forberg, che suscitarono l'accusa di ateismo, fino alle disposizioni del governo sassone, alle impressioni private dei contemporanei e agli interventi pubblicati da Fichte in polemica coi suoi detrattori, cfr. W. Röhr (ed.), *Appellation an das Publikum... Dokumente zum Atheismusstreit um Fichte, Forberg, Niethammer. Jena 1798 / 99*, Leipzig, Reclam, 1987, oltre naturalmente ai volumi I / 5 e I / 6 della *Johann Gottlieb Fichte-Gesamtausgabe* [GA], hrsg. von E. Fuchs, H. Gliwitzky, R. Lauth und P.K. Schneider, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-2012. Il lettore italiano può trovare la traduzione dei più importanti tra gli scritti fichtiani relativi allo *Streit* in J.G. Fichte, *La dottrina della religione*, a cura di G. Moretto, Napoli, Guida, 1989; per una documentata esposizione della vicenda storica e dei suoi presupposti culturali e storici, cfr. G. Rotta, *La "Idea Dio". Il pensiero religioso di Fichte fino all'Atheismusstreit*, Genova, Pantograf, 1995.

² Cfr. il *Vorwort* al *Versuch einer Kritik aller Offenbarung* degli editori della *Gesamtausgabe*, in GA I / 1, p. 3-15; per il lettore italiano cfr. l'*Introduzione* apposta dal curatore della traduzione dell'opera, in J.G. Fichte, *Saggio di una critica di ogni rivelazione*, a cura di M.M. Olivetti, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1998, p. VII-XIV.

nell'elaborazione della *filosofia critica* –, per una curiosa ironia della sorte proprio il ritorno, a soli sei anni di distanza, sul tema del *religioso* avrebbe costituito per il caparbio filosofo sassone la pietra di inciampo, provocandone non solo la perdita dell'insegnamento, ma guastando anche in modo traumatico la già compromessa fiducia nei confronti del pubblico³. Infatti, dopo l'apparizione dell'anonimo *Schreiben eines Vaters an seinen studierenden Sohn über den Fichteschen und Forbergischen Atheismus*⁴, a seguito del quale parti la confisca da parte dell'Elettorato di Sassonia del fascicolo del *Philosophisches Journal* contenente i due scritti incriminati di propalare l'ateismo, e dopo che Fichte ebbe tempestivamente replicato con un'apologia⁵ scritta alla sua maniera – la quale tanto dispiacque agli olimpici weimariani –, il mondo intellettuale tedesco esplose letteralmente, producendo sul tema in poco più di un anno un centinaio di opuscoli, articoli e recensioni. Come era da attendersi, in molti colsero a due mani l'occasione di poter attaccare pubblicamente il tenace propugnatore dell'*idealismo trascendentale*, da tempo invisibile per il suo repubblicanesimo giacobino, e di poterlo accusare in un sol punto tanto dell'astrusità logica della sua dottrina, quanto della perniciosità morale di essa. Non si fa torto a molti definendo del tutto triviale il tono generale degli scritti polemici sorti in tale contesto. In particolare, a diversi che intervennero sembrò che si potesse cogliere l'occasione per liquidare in blocco le conquiste del *criticismo*, in favore di un recupero delle istanze culturali e filosofiche proprie della *Aufklärung*, quali si esprimevano in modo del tutto esemplare nella cerchia di Nicolai; sicché suona piuttosto grottesco che proprio durante questo convulso dibattito sia tuonata la scomunica kantiana nei confronti della *Wissenschaftslehre*⁶, cui presero certo gusto parecchi che intendevano farla finita col maestro non meno che con l'allievo.

Ora, la rilevanza del tema e il tipo di dibattito sono tali, che chiunque abbia una qualche familiarità con gli autori della *Goethezeit* non potrebbe fare a meno di aspettarsi di udire a un certo momento l'ingresso della voce di Friedrich Schlegel in esso. Verosimilmente, già i contemporanei provarono una tale aspettativa, e con ragione, poiché egli *avrebbe dovuto* intervenire in tale contesa. La necessità di una presa di posizione in favore di Fichte fu

³ Cfr. GA I / 6, 26; tr. it. in J.G. Fichte, *La dottrina della religione*, cit., p. 129. Cfr. ancora la *Vorrede* di Fichte alla *Anweisung zum seeligen Leben*, in GA I / 9, p. 47; tr. it. in J.G. Fichte, *La dottrina della religione*, cit., p. 243.

⁴ Il livoroso opuscolo che innescò la polemica è leggibile in W. Röhr, *Appellation*, cit., p. 42-63; cfr. anche GA I / 6, p. 121-138.

⁵ Cfr. W. Röhr, *Appellation*, cit., p. 84-126 e GA I / 5, p. 415-453; tr. it. in J.G. Fichte, *La dottrina della religione*, cit., p. 85-126.

⁶ Cfr. *Fichte im Gespräch* [FG], hrsg. von E. Fuchs, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1978-2012, Bd. 2, p. 217-218.

infatti sentita da parte di tutto il gruppo dell'*Athenaeum*, e tanto più dai suoi Dioscuri, del tutto consci del proprio rapporto genealogico con la dottrina della scienza⁷. Così, già a partire da aprile o maggio del 1799, il mordace Friedrich è quasi deputato per la scrittura di una *brochure*⁸ sul tema. Il proposito fu certo preso sul serio dall'autore, sia perché fu disposta concretamente la destinazione editoriale (i tipi del berlinese Unger⁹), sia perché questi annunciò l'apparizione del proprio scritto al diretto interessato a più riprese.¹⁰

Date queste premesse, non è immediato stabilire il motivo dell'abbandono del progetto ad uno stato così embrionale quale quello che possediamo¹¹, tanto più che l'autore assicura più volte di aver sostanzialmente terminato l'opera. A dire il vero, già nella lettera al fratello in cui viene annunciata l'intenzione di intervenire pubblicamente nella disputa con un *pamphlet*, egli dichiara senza giri di parole di avere degli scrupoli ad esporsi così apertamente alla prevedibile ostilità dei censori del governo, tanto più che il contributo sarebbe apparso contemporaneamente alla *Lucinde*, facendolo apparire addirittura «più rivoluzionario» di quanto desiderato¹². Che la motivazione prudenziale sia la spiegazione più plausibile – insieme alla

⁷ A gennaio del 1799 A.W. Schlegel scriveva a Novalis: «Propriamente, il prode Fichte combatte per tutti noi, e se egli soccombe, allora i roghi si sono di nuovo fatti assai vicini» (FG 2, p. 39). La stessa consapevolezza si trova nelle parole di Friedrich, che nell'importante lettera in cui testimonia al fratello l'intenzione di intervenire pubblicamente esordisce proprio dicendo: «La causa fichtiana è senz'altro molto importante anche per noi» (FG 2, p. 168). Negli stessi giorni, in una lettera allo stesso Fichte, la definirà «di importanza *universale*. Si tratta, io credo, della causa della filosofia stessa, della causa dell'epoca e della nazione.» (GA III / 3, p. 377).

⁸ Cfr. F. Schlegel an A.W. Schlegel, April / Mai 1799, in FG 2, p. 168: «Sembri ritenere sia d'uopo che io scriva una *brochure* per Fichte; e in effetti ne sto già preparando una». *Brochüre* è il termine con cui Schlegel si riferirà sempre allo scritto in questione.

⁹ A maggio Friedrich scrive trionfalmente al fratello e a Karoline: «Con Unger è tutto apposto. [...] Si piglia anche il piccolo *Per Fichte*. [...] Ora mi metto all'opera *ateneizzando* e *fichtizzando*» (FG 2, 170). Il nome dell'editore per cui sarebbe dovuto apparire il saggio è fatto esplicitamente anche a Fichte, cfr. GA III / 3, 386.

¹⁰ In una lettera che con incertezza si può far risalire agli stessi giorni di quelle citate nelle note precedenti, e in cui, a posteriori, si può presentire il mancato esito della faccenda, Schlegel scrive a Fichte: «Se il tentativo non fallisce, entro qualche settimana apparirà una mia *brochure* su questo tema [l'accusa di ateismo]» (GA III / 3, 377). Il 24 giugno si spingeva addirittura a dire, sempre allo stesso: «La mia piccola *brochure* sulla Sua controversia, che deve essere stampata unicamente da *Unger*, sarà pronta in questi giorni» (GA III / 3, 386).

¹¹ In realtà, non disponiamo più dell'autografo di Schlegel. Il breve scritto fu incluso nell'edizione del Windischmann, in *Friedrich Schlegel's philosophische Vorlesungen aus den Jahren 1804 bis 1806. Nebst Fragmenten vorzüglich philosophisch-theologischen Inhalts*, hrsg. von C.J.H. Windischmann, Bonn, Weber, 1837, Bd. II, p. 423-427.

¹² Cfr. FG 2, p. 168.

«pigrizia» dell'autore – è d'altronde anche l'autorevole opinione di Haym¹³. Tuttavia, a credito della buona volontà di Schlegel, va detto che egli nei mesi successivi sembra davvero intenzionato a portare a termine il proprio scritto e, vista l'importanza che riconosce alla causa difesa in esso, è portato a considerare di rimandarne la stesura a vantaggio di una maggior estensione del lavoro¹⁴. In tal caso, il mutare del dibattito, il trasferimento dello stesso autore e, in breve, lo scioglimento del cenacolo jeneso avrebbero portato rapidamente all'eclissarsi di tale obiettivo dall'orizzonte delle priorità e degli interessi dello scrittore.

Per quel che concerne il contenuto e l'argomentazione del *Für Fichte*, esso si rifà piuttosto da vicino al tenore degli scritti di giustificazione fichtiani, respingendo l'accusa di ateismo al mittente, dal momento che chiunque sostenga che il concetto sovrasensibile del divino – quel Dio concepito come *moralische WeltOrdnung* che fonda e sollecita «la vera religione del retto agire gioioso»¹⁵ – non sia sufficiente a concepire la venerabilità e l'efficacia che devono competere alla divinità, proprio questi va diffondendo una concezione che per ben che vada si qualifica come superstiziosa, quando non sfoci in una vera e propria depravazione dell'idea del divino. Insomma, la polemica fichtiana contro il dogmatismo si salda chiaramente con quella romantica e tipicamente schlegeliana contro il filisteismo, che ostinatamente impedisce di schiudere le facoltà dello spirito umano, attraverso l'esercizio della *Einbildungskraft*, alla potenza dell'infinito e del divino¹⁶. Inoltre, accanto a questo attacco nel merito dei contenuti – che fa dell'*Atheismusstreit* il terreno di scontro più diretto tra *Aufklärung* e *Romantik* –, Schlegel fa notare anche assai sobriamente quanto poco sia di competenza di un potere statale che non voglia sconfinare nella tirannide il chiamare in appello dotti e cittadini circa le proprie opinioni sul fondamento ultimo di tutte le cose¹⁷.

¹³ Cfr. R. Haym, *Die romantische Schule. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes*, Berlin, Gaertner, 1870, p. 488; per il lettore italiano, cfr. R. Haym, *La scuola romantica. Contributo alla storia dello spirito tedesco*, tr. it. di E. Pocar, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1965, p. 532.

¹⁴ Cfr. F. Schlegel an A.W. Schlegel, August (?) 1799, in FG 2, p. 216: «Per quel che riguarda il mio *Per Fichte*, per comune deliberazione apparirà più tardi, ma in forma più ampia e secondo un altro piano».

¹⁵ J.G. Fichte, *Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche WeltRegierung*, in GA I / 5, p. 356; tr. it. in J.G. Fichte, *La dottrina della religione*, cit., p. 83.

¹⁶ In questo spirito, egli non si limita a definire atei gli oppositori dell'evangelo della filosofia trascendentale, bensì ad attribuirgli il positivo intento di realizzare il male: «Gli oppositori [di Fichte] non sono solamente atei, ma positivi servitori di Satana» (FG 2, p. 150).

¹⁷ Il fatto che lo *Streit* costituisse un precedente inaudito di messa in discussione della libertà in materia religiosa diffusa dal protestantesimo e ancor più dalla cultura illuminista dovette colpire particolarmente la generazione romantica. Che, peraltro, il governo intervenisse tanto alla leggera in questioni su cui non aveva la minima competenza per giudicare è ciò cui sembra alludere il commento provocatorio di Schleiermacher, trasmesso da Friedrich al

Ad ogni modo, se l'apologia schlegeliana dell'autentica religiosità della *Wissenschaftslehre* contro il perverso e ipocrita atteggiamento censorio dei detrattori di Fichte non apparve, i temi dell'abbozzo che ne possediamo mostrano paralleli evidenti con gli scritti pubblicati a stretto giro e con quanto condiviso da Schlegel coi destinatari delle sue lettere. E, anzi, il senso stesso della presa di posizione dell'autore verso l'amico e maestro si ritrova meravigliosamente compresso, nella formulazione gnomica e paradossale in cui egli seppe eccellere, nel frammento 105 delle *Ideen* del 1800: «Fichte avrebbe dunque attaccato la religione? Se l'interesse per il soprasensibile è l'essenza della religione, allora tutta la sua dottrina è religione in forma di filosofia»¹⁸.

fratello e a Karoline: «Schleiermacher ritiene che si dovrebbe pretendere dal Principe Elettore di Sassonia una definizione di Dio e della sua esistenza che sia legittimamente costante» (FG 2, 52).

¹⁸ KFSA II, p. 266; tr. it. in August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenaeum 1798-1800*, a cura di G. Cusatelli, tr. e note di E. Agazzi e D. Mazza, Milano, Bompiani, 2009, p. 618.

PER FICHTE.
AI TEDESCHI²⁰

Voi sapete dalle gazzette, o dagli scritti polemici che in merito a ciò sono stati resi noti, che il filosofo Fichte viene accusato di ateismo. Voi sapete di non comprendere la sua filosofia, né lo volete, nondimeno dovete però sentenziare e ritenete quell'accusa senz'altro vera; ma l'intera faccenda non è di alcun conto, perché Dio si aiuterà già da sé. Dal momento che, si capisce, voi avete da sbrigare tutt'altre cose al posto di agire per la sua causa secondo la sua volontà e persino combattere, secondo il caso. Per questo voi non avete tempo; tuttavia, quando una faida letteraria ha destato gran strepito, ben ne avete per sfogliare ogni libello; poiché in ciò trovate un diletto simile a quello che la marmaglia oziosa in molte grandi città trova nei combattimenti tra animali.

Potrebbe essere che, per la stessa ragione, vi siate imbattuti anche in questo scritto. Se questo è il caso, devo dirvi che non avevo intenzione di rendere servizio alla vostra curiosità circa l'oggetto dell'indagine, e perciò mi sono ben preoccupato, mediante la serietà del contenuto e dell'esposizione, di non soddisfare le vostre aspettative. Separiamoci ora una volta per tutte, poiché terrò eternamente a vile chiunque non prenda con serietà né la filosofia né la religione; costoro possono ingannare se stessi con una larva di religione, o semplicemente, consci del loro stesso ateismo, non riescono a concepire come si possa raccontare apertamente alla classe privilegiata una verità così triviale.

Ma siatemi benvenuti voi che prendete sul serio entrambe o anche solo una delle due! Siamo fratelli e concittadini della vostra repubblica, nella quale tutti, uniti e liberi dai vincoli terreni, aspirano all'eternità mediante verità e virtù, e dove ognuno che si senta chiamato a farlo deve dire il suo parere in merito a ciò che riguarda tutti. Non come un verdetto, o anche soltanto come proposta di una legge che valga universalmente; ma come voto di un singolo. Ognuno si sforzi soltanto di esistere come un singolo, ciò che egli deve essere; allora lo stesso spirito diverrà da sé universalmente chiaro a se stesso.

Voglio dunque parlare con voi soltanto alla condizione che condividiamo uguali diritti. Non domando di essere vostro giudice, ma neppure riconosco alcuno di voi come il mio, per quanto grandi possano pure essere la sua dignità e la sua reputazione.

²⁰ In: KFSa XVIII, p. 522-525.

Del resto, però, per ripeterlo ancora una volta, non voglio escludere nessuno che prenda con serietà la religione e la filosofia, o anche soltanto una delle due; né colui il quale ha sempre preso ciò con serietà, nonostante egli si sarebbe piuttosto dovuto intiepidire, per il fatto di non riuscire a venirne in chiaro; né chiunque non sia ancora completamente inaccessibile a ciò che soltanto è santo ed eternamente buono; dato che forse proprio *adesso* è arrivato il momento in cui debba dischiuderglisi l'intendimento di ciò; giacché ciò deve pur significare, per ogni uomo che sia degno di questo nome, *ora o mai più*.

Veniamo ora al fatto, e anzi per prima cosa si dica qualche parola sul vero punto della controversia, che è stato totalmente frainteso in una maniera inconcepibile. Non è affatto questione di ateismo e teismo. Poiché Fichte e quelli tra i suoi oppositori che agiscono con buone intenzioni sono completamente concordi che l'uomo debba riferire l'intera sua condotta alla santa volontà di Dio. L'oggetto della disputa è l'esistenza in generale, niente affatto la cosiddetta esistenza di Dio, bensì ogni esistenza in generale e il valore o la mancanza di valore della quale rispetto all'agire e la relazione di entrambi all'infinito e al finito. Fichte sostiene che il puro agire sia l'originario e il primo da cui scaturisce l'esistenza, e che sia irrazionale derivare l'agire da un'esistenza originariamente data, alla maniera dei filosofi precedenti. Che ogni esistenza sia finita e sensibile e che solamente nell'agire l'uomo possa cogliere l'infinito e conquistarsi la cittadinanza nel mondo soprasensibile. Che, perciò, il filosofo in quanto tale non possa pensare la ragione infinita altrimenti che nel suo eterno agire e in quanto essa è questo stesso agire, ma in nessun modo attribuirle un'esistenza al di fuori di questo agire. In una parola, è la disputa tra idealismo e realismo.

Ora vi prego di riflettere per bene se una disputa di tale contenuto, una disputa sulla questione se l'attività sia da attribuire originariamente all'oggetto o al soggetto, possa essere decisa dal braccio secolare.

Di conseguenza l'intera accusa di ateismo si basa su un semplice malinteso. Di questa disputa non si dovrebbe proprio più far parola, poiché non se ne sarebbe dovuta fare affatto. Si tratta certo di un malinteso assai comprensibile, dal momento che il realismo è innato in ogni uomo, mentre l'astrazione è uno stato artificiale. Lo spirito si sviluppa sul puntello del dato prima di potersi innalzare alla concezione del pensare libero, e anche allora, dove non ci sia abbastanza forza, ci si accorge sempre della mancanza del vecchio sostegno. Molti sono concordi con Fichte nello spirito e come uomini, eppure non riescono a orientarsi nelle sue espressioni, anche laddove egli scrive in modo popolare, perché la sua teoria, per loro incomprensibile, esercita dappertutto il suo influsso. Questi possono essere uomini assai

meritevoli, ma se lo sono non vorranno sentenziare su nulla di ciò che non comprendono secondo la propria coscienza. Si può presupporre che come minimo non risolveranno la questione, e sotto questo riguardo io l'ho definito un malinteso, però un malinteso incomprensibile, dal momento che negli atti si trova tanto chiaramente che l'accusa non ha assolutamente alcun fondamento.

Magari voi direte: se è così, perché Fichte ha bisogno di indegne rappresaglie e chiama di ritorno atei i suoi oppositori?

Ebbene, magari non sono mere rappresaglie. Ciò non accade affatto soltanto per far valere i propri diritti; ma è, beninteso, serietà nel senso più pieno e verità nel senso letterale del termine.

Se c'è una religione che sia quella vera, allora ogni altra è falsa. Questo è proprio ciò di cui non se ne vuol sapere nulla in quest'epoca affettata, in cui l'uomo, la virtù e ogni cosa sono caduti in un tono da conversazione così smanceroso e arrendevole che alla verità stessa è consentito essere piuttosto falsa che scortese.

Ora, secondo questa amabile visione del mondo non si ha la licenza di separare così rigorosamente il buono e il cattivo, e, come gli uomini, anche le religioni sarebbero differenti soltanto secondo il grado. Una tolleranza indegna nei confronti della mancanza di fede nell'Altissimo, che mostra maggiormente la sua debolezza proprio quando vuole sembrare cristianesimo. Poiché la differenza assoluta, che quest'ultimo riconosce a gran voce tra virtù e vizio, tra verità e menzogna, tra la religione e l'irreligione, è visibile in maniera così evidente e chiara nella storia e nelle scritture e ovunque esso abbia avuto vigore, che neppure un ragionamento tanto artificioso è capace di oscurarla, persino agli occhi del profano.

E proprio in questo la filosofia di Fichte si accorda completamente alla religione cristiana – non per una qualche convergenza arbitraria, bensì spinta dall'intima necessità dei suoi propri principi. Anche secondo questa filosofia nel mondo c'è un eterno conflitto del bene e del male. Nell'uomo ci sono due tendenze originariamente distinte, quella verso il finito e quella verso l'infinito; dunque non solamente una differenza di grado, sfumature di virtù e di vizio, bensì una contrapposizione assoluta delle vie che a ogni uomo è consentito percorrere liberamente.

Finché ci sono ancora molti che vivono con una disposizione d'animo mondana e pochi altri con disposizione d'animo spirituale, ci saranno due religioni non solamente distinte, ma assolutamente contrapposte, se la religione di un uomo non può essere altro che quanto di più intimo e proprio vi è in lui, ciò che di suo è il primo e il sommo, e se, secondo l'osservazione di Aristotele, i suoi dèi devono somigliare a ciò che egli stesso è.

Certamente la religione falsa, che solo in apparenza è religione, ma che non è propriamente tale, dissimulerà con ogni forza questa contrapposizione perentoria e non vorrà negarla soltanto di fronte agli altri, bensì anche a se stessa; perché con il riconoscimento di quella contrapposizione è subito evidente la sua propria nullità. Naturalmente, il finito, il quale vuole usurpare i (santi) diritti dell'infinito, deve aver l'aria (con smancerosa affabilità) di andare d'accordo con esso, e negare le eterne differenze!

Non così la santa religione, che è tale realmente. Questa si contrapporrà e dovrà contrapporsi eternamente alla sua possibile imitazione nella maniera più aspra, dovrà respingerla incondizionatamente e smascherarla senza indulgenza ovunque la incontri. Così è, così era e così sarà. Di qui la polemica della quale pigliano tanto scandalo i deboli.

Sono ben lungi dal tacciare su due piedi di seguire una religione cattiva e indegna tutti coloro che non comprendono l'idealismo e si aggrappano alla dottrina dell'eudemonia. Questo è lontano da me, quanto lo è anche da Fichte. Poiché più di una volta egli ha riconosciuto il fatto che molti di coloro che aderiscono a quella dottrina, specialmente in Germania, fraintendono loro stessi per quanto concerne la teoria – in base al suo sapere –, ma possono ben avere una disposizione morale ed esser pieni di santa serietà.

Tuttavia, se la descrizione che egli abbozza di quella falsa religione, la quale trasferisce completamente la propria depravazione, senza alcun sentore di qualcosa di meglio, nella visione della divinità e del rapporto con essa, e per questo si costituisce come l'unica giusta, dimodoché mediante ciò, se questo fosse possibile, il miglioramento sarebbe impedito per sempre; se questa calzante descrizione si adatti a molti o a pochi soggetti, ognuno può facilmente stimare secondo la misura della propria conoscenza della cultura e dell'epoca, e potrebbe pure riflettere prima di sospettare che Fichte e chi sia del suo stesso parere stiano contendendo soltanto contro un'ombra, e che un'irreligione positiva non si dia. Ma tutto ciò che non è religione e tuttavia vuole sembrare tale è necessariamente contrapposto realmente alla religione e deve essere estirpato, ecc. ecc.

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“Introduction” to *Transcendental Philosophy* (1800-1801)

Excerpt

Friedrich Schlegel

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Joseph Carew*

Friedrich Schlegel was, in many respects, the leading figure of early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*) and one of its most significant theoreticians. He was responsible, along with his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel, for the establishment, in 1798, of the journal *Athenaeum*, a gesture that was the veritable founding of the movement and gave it an official organ. During its three volumes and six issues that ran from 1798–1800, many of the movement’s now most renowned names were contributors (e.g., the two Schlegel brothers, Dorothea von Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel [later Schelling], Novalis, the pen name of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, and Friedrich Schleiermacher). Indeed, many of the writings that we now consider the most crucial to the movement, both philosophical and poetic, appeared in its pages. These include Schlegel’s *Fragments*, where the perhaps most famous definition of Romantic poetry is given, Novalis’ *Hymns to the Night*, and Schleiermacher’s *Speeches on Religion*. Without a shadow of a doubt, these years were the heyday of early German Romanticism and Schlegel’s role in its success and productivity was central, to say the least.

Change, however, was on the horizon in 1800, just two years after the journal got off to a hot start—change for Schlegel and early German

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Romanticism itself. The journal was being discontinued. *Athenaeum* did not find the public that was hoped for, which put a wrench in Schlegel's plans of trying to make it as an independent author. So, in the summer of 1800 he turned to pursue academics and registered in the doctoral program of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Jena.¹ Instead of a dissertation, he submitted two previously published works for evaluation: *The Greeks and Romans* and *History of the Poesy of the Greeks and Romans*, the first published in 1797 and the second in 1798. Jena would have been a natural choice for Schlegel to get a doctorate. There are several reasons why. First of all, he was already there. More importantly, though, Jena had been the home base of early German Romanticism and where many of its representatives lived, which in turn permitted a free exchange of ideas and collaboration between them. In addition, it was a hotbed of post-Kantian German Idealist thought. That being said, Jena, too, was undergoing shifts of its own. At the time of the foundation of the *Athenaeum*, Jena was the bustling intellectual capital of Germany. The presence of some of the best philosophical and scientific minds of the period there attracted thinkers, artists, and students alike to the small town. But in 1799, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, then a kind of celebrity philosopher, was driven out of the University of Jena due to the accusation of atheism leveled against him. Other big names in other disciplines were getting headhunted. Jena was losing the appeal it had, making people look for greener pastures. Then, in 1801, Novalis died, with Schlegel at his side. Hölderlin's mental health was collapsing. Little could have Schlegel known that by June of 1802, he would find himself in Paris and that, in the spring of 1803, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, whose *Naturphilosophie* gave much inspiration to the project of early German Romanticism and who, too, was an intimate member of its group, would also leave Jena behind for the University of Würzburg. By that point, the other early German Romantics had long left the city. In short, in 1800 the close-knit circle of early German Romanticism was already in the process of disbanding. Just a few years later, the representatives who were still living and sane were slowly reconsidering their philosophical allegiances. Schlegel himself in 1808 converted to Catholicism, seemingly leaving behind the Romanticism of his youth.

¹ For more detailed information on the historical background of Schlegel's doctorate and habilitation, which form the immediate context of the lectures *Transcendental Philosophy* and upon which I here rely, see Ernst Behler, "Friedrich Schlegels Vorlesungen über Transzendentalphilosophie. Jena (1800–1801)," in *Transzendentalphilosophie und Spekulation. Der Streit um die Gestalt einer Ersten Philosophie (1799–1807)*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993), 53ff.

While Schlegel was awarded a doctorate on the basis of *The Greeks and Romans* and *History of the Poesy of the Greeks and Romans* and the requirement for a normal oral defense was waived, he nevertheless had to give a test lecture to the Faculty of Philosophy at Jena in its place to officially obtain his doctorate. The title of the talk was “Concerning Enthusiasm or Concerning Fanaticism” and took place in October, just a few months after he initially registered in the doctoral program. This lecture permitted him to acquire a teaching licence (a *licentiam legendis*). One of the lecture courses Schlegel decided to give was *Transcendental Philosophy*, which was, interestingly enough, listed in the course catalogue even before Schlegel had the right to teach it. Around this time, Schlegel also announced his disputation (*disputatio*) on Plato, which would enable him to receive his habilitation. The lectures began on 27 October, 1800 and ended on 24 March, 1801, incidentally coming to a close only ten days after he successfully completed his disputation. They were attended by around sixty individuals—which is a decently impressive number, given that, over its history to that point, the town of Jena never had more than 5,000 inhabitants. In the audience were the philosophers Jakob Friedrich Fries and even Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Any textual trace of the lectures was long thought lost to the ravages of time, whether it be a manuscript or a transcript, partial or complete. But then, over a century later in 1927, Josef Körner discovered a transcript, the author of which remains unknown, and which was edited and published for the first time in 1935.² While some scholars have lamented the fact that Schlegel’s manuscript was never found, it is worth mentioning, in this regard, that Schlegel himself admitted that he more often extemporized on the basis of notes than he read from an already written text (the latter being a common practice—the German for “lecture” [*Vorlesung*] means, quite literally, “a reading aloud”). Since the transcript’s first publication in 1935, it has been re-edited as volume 12 of the critical edition of Schlegel’s works³ and appeared as a stand-alone volume in the “Philosophical Library” series of the Felix Meiner Publishing House.⁴ The translation that follows is the first half

² Friedrich Schlegel, *Transcendentalphilosophie*, in *Neue philosophische Schriften. Erstmals in Druck gelegt, erläutert und mit einer Einleitung in Fr. Schlegels philosophischen Entwicklungsgang (Mit einer Faksimilereproduktion von Schlegels Habilitationsgesuch an die Universität Jena)*, ed. Josef Körner (Frankfurt am Main: Gerhard Schulte-Bulmke 1935), 115-221.

³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel – Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke*, ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, and Hans Heichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–).

⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, *Transcendentalphilosophie*, ed. Michael Elsässer (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1991).

of Schlegel's Introduction to the lectures.⁵ It is part of the project of translating the transcript in full for the first time in English.

The 1800-1801 Jena lectures *Transcendental Philosophy* are of interest for numerous reasons, both for scholars of early German Romanticism, German Idealism, and the history of post-Kantian philosophy, and for those intellectually curious about the movement and that period of Western philosophy. Let's briefly focus on four salient ones: their form; their content; their historical backdrop; and their audience. What holds for the lectures as a whole equally holds for the first half of their Introduction, where one finds all the major ideas and doctrines that will occupy Schlegel and which also occupy early German Romanticism as a movement from start to finish: our consciousness of the absolute; our yearning for it; the relativity of truth; the symbolic nature of knowledge; and the infinity of philosophy. The lectures begin with a bang and, like any good work of philosophy or literature, intuitively broach the major themes that will be fleshed out in full.

First of all, there is the matter of the form the lectures take. While much has been made of the role of the fragment in Romantic thought, namely, the supposedly intrinsically anti- or asystematic nature of their vision of philosophy and truth, the lectures adopt something quite atypical in early German Romanticism: a systematic exposition. Indeed, Schlegel is clear that the method that he employs is the same as that of physics and mathematics: it proceeds via problems, theorems, axioms, and constructions—even if the method nonetheless upholds that the system that thereby arises is only ever an approximation (*Approximation*) of a truth that constitutively exceeds it. It is a marriage of rationalism and relativism. Furthermore, the system that Schlegel builds is a full-fledged system in the precise sense that the term acquires in post-Kantian philosophy, which is to say that it assumes the form of “a self-subsisting whole” (*ein für sich bestehendes Ganze*),⁶ “a scientific whole that is complete in itself” (*ein wissenschaftliches Ganze, das in sich vollendet ist*).⁷

⁵ The pagination in the margins of the translation given below refers to the critical edition. Each page break is marked by “|.” In notes, the lectures are cited as *Transcendental Philosophy* followed by the pagination. An earlier translation of the full Introduction exists: “Friedrich Schlegel: Introduction to the Transcendental Philosophy (1800),” *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, ed. and trans. Jochen Schulte-Sasse et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 240–277. A French translation of the first half of the Introduction also exists: Friedrich Schlegel, “Philosophie transcendante. Introduction,” in *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna, avec la traduction de la Philosophie transcendante (Introduction – Philosophie de la philosophie)*, ed. Denis Thouard (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2002), 169–177. Both have been consulted for the preparation of the present translation.

⁶ Schlegel, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 3.

⁷ Schlegel, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 18.

As one would expect from a system builder of that generation, the terrain of subject matters the lectures cover is vast: its own method, epistemology, metaphysics, the history of consciousness, a theory of human nature, morality, politics, religion, and even meta-philosophy. Schlegel's *Transcendental Philosophy* is therefore a unique work in the early German Romantic corpus.

Secondly, the lectures irrefutably situate Schlegel's brand of Romanticism within the context of that strand of post-Kantian philosophy that sought to internally overcome Kant's critique of the possibility of metaphysical knowledge by combining metaphysics with epistemology, realism with idealism, or Spinoza with Fichte. They do so by inscribing the perspective of consciousness within the absolute such that, everywhere in the natural universe, there is some, even if only inchoate, awareness. That is, there is no qualitative difference as we move from inanimate matter to human experience, but a quantitative one: "Our formula [...] goes roughly something like this: 'The minimum of the I is equal to the maximum of nature; and the minimum of nature is equal to the maximum of the I.' In other words, the smallest sphere of consciousness is equal to the largest sphere of nature and vice versa."⁸ But this is not a simple pantheism; it entails, for Schlegel, that consciousness itself is not something external to the absolute, whereby the question of how to transcend its perspective to arrive at reality does not arise in the same way as it would in a strictly Kantian framework. Consciousness itself is a fundamental dimension of the absolute. Put differently, consciousness itself participates in the absolute's own existence and self-development. In Schlegel's words, "*the sole predicate of the infinite is consciousness.*"⁹

In this manner, the lectures ask us to qualify, if not put into question, those readings of Schlegel (and, by implication, perhaps Romanticism as a whole) that are strictly epistemological. There is, for instance, the interpretation of Manfred Frank who sees the absolute as a mere regulative ideal for the systematic organization of knowledge à la Kant;¹⁰ and there is, in a similar vein but more radical, the interpretation of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy that the absolute is a fiction.¹¹ Schlegel is definitively a post-

⁸ Schlegel, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 6.

⁹ Schlegel, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 6.

¹⁰ See, to mention one of many possible texts, Manfred Frank, "'Alle Wahrheit ist Relativ, Alles Wissen Symbolisch'—Motive der Grundsatz-Skepsis in der frühen Jenaer Romantik (1796)," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 50 (1996): 403–436.

¹¹ See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988).

Kantian, but closer to the Schelling of *Naturphilosophie* than to Fichte's transcendental philosophy wherein all knowledge is a construct of the subject proceeding from *a priori* categories, despite appearances otherwise in other works. As Schlegel succinctly puts it in the concluding Part III of the lectures: "All philosophy is the philosophy of the universe."¹²

Thirdly, there is the matter of when the lectures occurred in the history of post-Kantian philosophy. Schlegel's lectures came to fruition at a time when the early German Romantic movement was, well, starting to come to a close after a period of frenzied productivity. One should therefore look at these lectures as the culmination of Schlegel's engagement with the main ideas, doctrines, and themes of the movement. If we are right to take Schelling's 1801 *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* as a historically momentous, decisive text that clearly shows the difference between Schelling's and Fichte's systems, where the disciple takes his distance from the teacher, then Schlegel's 1800-1801 lectures *Transcendental Philosophy*, too, ought to be taken as a historically momentous, decisive text that clearly shows the difference between Fichte's and Schlegel's systems and, in addition, the difference between Schlegel's and Schelling's systems—no matter how much Schlegel did, in point of fact, learn from Fichte and Schelling and adapt into his own thinking. The lectures are of great significance to any attempt to properly situate early German Romanticism in post-Kantian philosophy and in German Idealism in particular. They testify, both historically and philosophically, to a moment of multiple transitions.

Lastly, there is the fourth reason why these lectures are of interest: the audience to whom they were addressed. Schlegel's *Transcendental Philosophy* was intended, first and foremost, for philosophy students. Very appropriately, both the logical structure of the system that Schlegel builds and the formulations he provides for his own thought and the Romantic project are at times very lucid, precise, and informative. From beginning to end, there is an obvious focus and thread to follow. In this regard, the lectures present a certain advantage for those more expressly interested in the philosophical commitments of the Romantic movement over the aphoristic character of many other writings from Schlegel and his fellow collaborators or, as they would perhaps prefer us to put it, his fellow symphilosophers, which often combine genres and diverse subject matters, as well as over the suggestive character of their more literary achievements. To be true to the spirit of these lectures as intended for students, many of the notes added are of an explanatory and historical nature.

¹² Schlegel, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 91.

Transcendental Philosophy

Friedrich Schlegel

Introduction

| 3

We philosophize—that is a fact. We thus begin; we start with something. That something is this: *a striving* for a type of knowledge that is of an entirely *sui generis* sort, a type of knowledge that should refer to the human being taken as a whole. It should not, therefore, refer solely to *the actions performed by human beings*—for actions are, as it were, only one pole of the human being—rather, it should also refer to *our knowledge* of the human being. That something will therefore have to be this: *a type of knowledge of knowledge*.

This would be, in a manner of speaking, a definition of philosophy. But when we begin to philosophize, it cannot serve as our main thread. For were I to take as my starting point the proposition “Philosophy is a type of *knowledge of knowledge*,” there would then always be some type of knowledge that is presupposed. *Philosophy is an experiment* and that’s why anyone who is going to philosophize will always have to begin from scratch. (It is not the same in philosophy as it is in other sciences, where one takes what others have already achieved in the name of science and builds upon it. Philosophy is really a self-subsisting whole and anyone who is going to philosophize will have to begin purely and simply, from scratch.)

Thus, we, too, begin purely and simply.

Philosophy is supposed to be a type of knowledge and, indeed, a type of absolute knowledge; we therefore have to strive to ensure that every step that we take is *necessary* and contains nothing hypothetical.

Hence, the *method* according to which we will proceed will be the method of *physics* or *mathematics*. Namely, our investigations will be a type of *experimenting*, as in physics, or a type of *constructing*, as with mathematics. The method of these sciences is completely and utterly *independent* and that’s why it also has to be applied here.

Logic, as the organon of truth, provides us with *the principle of non-contradiction* and *the principle of sufficient reason*. Admittedly, by appealing to them we gain nothing in terms of the material of truth; but we nonetheless have to avail ourselves of them when stating and expressing what we discover through philosophizing. But the source of *truth* lies, for us, far higher than in

these principles, inasmuch as *skepsis* also lays claim to these principles.¹ In addition, these principles cannot satisfy us with regard to *their form* either. We have to search for something higher.

| 4 To be sure, Fichte also uses these principles in his philosophy, but the meaning that they there acquire is such that they are no longer the same principles at all.²

Logic also offers us a definition of truth, namely, that truth is *the correspondence of a representation with its subject matter*.³ That says no more, and should also say no more, than what a sign says about the thing that is supposed to be denoted.

PROBLEM I: *Determining the character of philosophy*.⁴

(The word “character” means something different than “definition.” A *definitio* assigns a genus and specific differentia ([*per*] *genus* and *differentiam specificam*);⁵ but this is something that we in philosophy do not desire and cannot do, since the specific differentia would be infinite.) If we have charged ourselves with the task of *determining the character of philosophy*, that does not

¹ Here, as elsewhere, Schlegel makes a distinction between “*skepsis*” (*Skepsis*) as a general philosophical attitude and “skepticism” (*Skeptizismus*) as the philosophical doctrine that knowledge is impossible.

² In the Jena *Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Science (Wissenschaftslehre)* from 1794-1795, Fichte takes as his starting point the logical principle of identity and then the logical principle of non-contradiction. He endeavors to show that these putatively first principles of logic depend, in fact, upon two more fundamental first principles, namely, the principles “I am” and “I am not the Not-I.” These correspond to the mind’s radical power to posit itself absolutely and unconditionally as well to posit content that is other than it, which is the basis of consciousness and hence makes even logic possible. *Foundation of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre and Related Writings (1794-95)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 200-210; *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Walter Jacobs, Hans Gliwitzky, and Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-2012), I / 2: 255-268.

³ *Gegenstand*.

⁴ One should recall that Schlegel has just finished saying that he will employ the method of physics and mathematics. See *Transcendental Philosophy*, 3. As such, several terms are now slowly introduced that should be taken in their technical meaning in those disciplines: problem, theorem, and axiom. A “problem” is, put simply, a proposition that requires a solution, via either some mathematical operation or geometric construction. More specifically in this context, it is an inquiry that, taking as its starting point some given conditions, seeks to demonstrate a fact or law. “Problem” contrasts with “theorem”: the latter stands for a proposition that, while not self-evident (like an axiom), has been demonstrated on the basis of other truths.

⁵ Here Schlegel is repeating the scholastic formulation of what a definition consists in: *definitio fit per genus proximum et differentiam specificam* (definition proceeds from the closest genus and the specific differentia).

mean *determining it with perfect precision*—that would then be us defining it—rather, it means determining it so far as it is possible for our purposes.

Aphorisms on problem I.

1st *Aphorism*: “Philosophy begins with *skepsis*.” This is a *completely and utterly negative state*. — If we wish to apply the method of mathematics and wish to construct philosophy, then we already here have one *factor*, namely, the *negative factor* in our possession. The other *factor*, the *positive factor*, will be *enthusiasm*.⁶

Philosophical *skepsis* has the peculiar trait that it also refers to the human being taken as a whole. And enthusiasm has to *have a certain directedness toward knowledge*.

2nd *Aphorism*: “The tendency of philosophy is to move toward the absolute.” But not toward something relatively absolute, but rather toward the *absolutely absolute*. In addition, we can divide the absolute according to the method of mathematics into two factors.

The negative factor is what we discover when we take the opposite of “unconditioned,” which is “the conditioned.” The latter hangs together, as it were, in an infinite chain whose originary or first link is, just like every link, purely and simply *something singular*. The originary also goes by the name “the primitive,” and the opposite of it is “totality.”

Any knowledge of the originary or primitive gives us *principles*. And any knowledge of the totality gives us *ideas*. A *principle* is therefore a type of *knowledge of the originary*. An *idea* is a *type of knowledge of the whole*.

⁶ There are two things to note. First, “enthusiasm” translates “*Enthusiasmus*,” both of which etymologically derive from the Greek “ἐνθουσιᾶσμός” (*enthousiasmós*, divine inspiration), itself related to “ἐνθουσιάζειν” (*enthousiazerein*, to be inspired or possessed by a god), a word that, in turn, relates to “ἐν” (*en*, in) and “θεός” (*theós*, god). For Schlegel, what inspires or possesses us is the absolute, which goes by many names in the lectures (e.g., the infinite, the divine). Second, “enthusiasm” is a common translation of what Kant names “*Schwärmerei*,” but which is often alternatively rendered as “visionary rapture” and “fanaticism” and which Kant defines as “a delusion of being able to see something beyond the bounds of sensibility.” *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200) 156; *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Kant's Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. The Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900–), 5: 275. In Kant, *Schwärmerei* is pejorative; it is a theoretical and practical vice to be guarded against. What Schlegel has in mind should not be confused with Kant. Schlegel’s enthusiasm is, by its very nature, positive; it is, indeed, a theoretical and practical virtue. Interestingly, in the context of acquiring his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Jena, Schlegel had to give a test lecture to the Faculty of Philosophy in place of a typical oral defense. To this end, on 18 October, 1801 he gave a talk entitled “Concerning Enthusiasm or Concerning Fanaticism,” which was responsible for him obtaining a teaching license (*licentiam legendis*). No textual trace of this talk has ever been found.

5

We say “principles”⁷ instead of “basic, foundational propositions”⁸; for it could very much be the case that principles are not *propositions*,⁹ but rather *facts*¹⁰; so, for instance, the principle of Fichtean philosophy, “I am I,” is not a proposition, but rather a fact. So, in physics the principle of life would be a fact if (we are only supposing this) all life arose from the reciprocal interaction of hydrogen and oxygen. So, we say “idea” instead of “concept” because what is supposed to be thereby denoted cannot be grasped in a concept according to its usual meaning and is, in a manner of speaking, *incomprehensible*,¹¹ namely, *according to how the term is intended to be used*. For example, take “The Not-I is equal to the I.”

3rd *Aphorism*: “Principles and ideas make the matter of philosophy.”

As you can tell, the matter of philosophy has been discovered. Now the question crops up: “What is the form of philosophy?” Philosophy should be concerned with the human being taken as a whole and be *a type of knowledge* about it. Anyone who acts according to any type of knowledge, acts *according to a purpose, according to a rule*, and so on. In so doing, they distinguish themselves from someone who does not act according to any type of knowledge. The fact that they act according to a purpose, according to a rule, is also something that they must express; and the term for this is “consistency”. Consistency presupposes *harmony* and both taken together are *unity*.¹² Thus:

4th *Aphorism*: “The form of philosophy is absolute unity.”

Here, there is no question of this being the unity of a system; for the latter is not absolute. As soon as something is a system, it is not absolute. Absolute unity would be something like a chaos of systems.

PROBLEM II: *Searching for the common midpoint of all principles and ideas.*

This common midpoint that we are searching for will have to be something *that would be the principle of all ideas and the idea of all principles*.

Now, in order to discover this, we must abstract from everything that is *not absolute*. This is not, however, something we do by just wishing away, while in thought, whatever is not absolute. No; we have to constitute that which stands opposed to what we are supposed to be abstracting from. We must thus posit, purely and simply, the *infinite*.

⁷ *Prinzipien*.

⁸ *Grundsätzen*.

⁹ *Sätze*.

¹⁰ *Fakta*.

¹¹ Cf. Friedrich Schlegel, “On Incomprehensibility,” trans. Peter Firchow, in *Classic and Romantic Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 297-307. The text takes from 1800.

¹² *Transcriber’s Note*: Consistency, the positive factor of unity; harmony, the negative factor.

If we, however, now posit the infinite, and in so doing cancel out¹³ everything that stands opposed to it, nevertheless something still remains, namely, that which *is doing the abstracting* or that which *is doing the positing*. What therefore still remains outside *the infinite* is *a consciousness of the infinite*. So, consciousness is, as it were, a *phenomenon* nearby the infinite.

And now we have, as it were, the elements that can yield a philosophy; they are, namely, *consciousness* and *the infinite*. They are, as it were, the two poles around which all philosophy revolves.

Fichtean philosophy is concerned with *consciousness*. Spinoza's philosophy, however, is concerned with *the infinite*. The formula for Fichte's philosophy is "I = I"—or, as we prefer to say in its place, "Not-I = I." This is probably a better way of putting it because, when so put, the proposition is, even in terms of how it is formulated, the most synthetic of all.

The formula for Spinoza's philosophy would run something like this: If one uses the variable *a* to think about what *is presentable* and *x* to think about *what is not presentable*, then "*a = x*."

Two more formulae come about as a result of these by combining them, namely, "Not-I = *x*"¹⁴ and "*a = I*."

This latter formula, namely, "*a = I*" is the formula of our philosophy. The proposition is *indirect* and involves canceling out the error of *the finite* so that the *infinite* will arise on its own.

Our formula, still considered from a positive point of view, goes roughly something like this: "The minimum of the I is equal to the maximum of nature; and the minimum of nature is equal to the maximum of the I." In other words, the smallest sphere of consciousness is equal to the largest sphere of nature and vice versa.

Within an individual, their consciousness of the infinite is their *feeling of the sublime*. The latter is in quite a crude state in the individual. And *this feeling* is *enthusiasm*, which we earlier encountered as a factor of philosophy. The feeling of the sublime should therefore be elevated to the status of science.

The elements of philosophy are *consciousness* and the *infinite*. These are also the elements of all reality. Reality is the point of indifference between the two. It is only for consciousness that consciousness possesses reality outside of consciousness. Consciousness is necessary because I, by positing a possible consciousness, simultaneously posit an actual consciousness; and *whatever is actual in virtue of its possibility is necessary*. The infinite is something

¹³ *aufheben*.

¹⁴ *Transcriber's Note*: "Not-I = *x*" is the formula of all non-philosophy.

you cannot abstract from, period. For the infinite alone could annihilate the infinite. That is to say, therefore, that *the infinite possesses reality for consciousness*. The infinite is something that you can only purely and simply posit. *The sole object¹⁵ of consciousness is the infinite and the sole predicate of the infinite is consciousness*. Both elements form a closed sphere, in the middle of which lies reality. *A synthesis has to be thought up between the two extremes of consciousness and the infinite*. It is only through abstraction that we attain them and *the tendency of abstraction is synthetic*.

Out of this, we get the following result for our philosophy:

| 7

THEOREM I

ALL IS IN ONE AND ONE IS ALL.¹⁶

This is the principle of all ideas and the idea of all principles.

We came to this theorem by abstracting from everything that stands opposed to the absolute. That's why we posited the *infinite* purely and simply; simultaneously, however, we also had a *consciousness of the infinite*; and *this is what all philosophy emerges from*.

This phenomenon is something that we have to consider in more detail.

If we abstract from *knowing* and *willing* in human beings—and this is something we have to do because we are, first of all, searching for a type of

¹⁵ *Objekt*.

¹⁶ “All is in One and One is All” is Schlegel’s take on the Spinozist motto “Ἐν καὶ Πᾶν” (*Hen kai pân*, One and All). By invoking the latter, Schlegel is expressly contributing to the then-ongoing Pantheism Controversy (*Pantheismusstreit*), instigated by a conversation between Gotthold Ephraim Lessing—then perhaps *the* representative of the Enlightenment in Germany—and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, during which the former reportedly declared: “*Hen kai pan!* I know of nothing else. [...] There is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza.” *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 187; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Brewslay: Gottl. Löwe, 1785), 12-13. In publishing his correspondence with Mendelssohn regarding Lessing’s confession, Jacobi used the conversation as cannon fodder in a war on the Enlightenment. According to Jacobi, Spinoza was the epitome of the Enlightenment because he was the most consistent of philosophers, something that he insinuated Lessing—who, again, was *the* representative of the Enlightenment in Germany—recognized in his confession. Spinoza, and Spinoza alone had, so Jacobi, the courage to take reason to its logical conclusion: a substance monism wherein everything that exists is a product of nature and its inexorable laws, leading, in turn, to determinism and atheism. Faced with this and its consequences for individual freedom and religion, Jacobi contended that faith over reason must be the basis of genuine knowledge, a position that was received as a form of fideism. In siding with Spinoza over Jacobi, Schlegel is implying that Spinozism does not equal determinism and atheism, even if he concedes that reason is not the be-all and end-all of philosophy. Speaking of logic, he says, after all, “the source of *truth* lies, for us, far higher.” See above *Transcendental Philosophy*, 3.

knowledge related thereto¹⁷—we discover something else, that is, *feelings* and *aspirations*. Our intention is to see whether we might be able to discover here something analogous to us being conscious of the infinite. To start with, let's take a look at *feelings*.

Were we to think past all the singular, many and various feelings, those that bring about changes in human life, we would still be left with *one feeling*. *That is the feeling of the sublime*, and in it we discover an analogy with the *consciousness of the infinite*.

Many have tried to explain this feeling;¹⁸ but that cannot be done. It is *the ultimate, the originary*, something that cannot be explained. It is what distinguishes the human being from animals. It does not lie in its subject matter. Its subject matter could be anything whatsoever. The feeling is *unique*; it is what is *originary* in the human being. It does not depend on culture. It is something that we also find, with the highest level of vitality, in the most uncivilized, crude people. It arises when all our singular and, in a manner of speaking, ordinary feelings are suddenly suspended. It is the same in the case of *acts of aspiring*. There is, among the many singular acts of aspiring that make human life be marked by variety and variation, one that stands out among them all, this being *striving toward an ideal*. This does not, however, emerge from nature, but rather merely from culture. Our intention was to seek the highest, something that, if we abstract from knowing and willing, may be discovered that would be analogous to being conscious of the infinite. We discovered the *feeling of the sublime* and *striving toward the ideal*. We must now climb up to even higher heights and see what kind of *common ultimate term* results from these two, which is something meditated between the two. This is *a longing, the yearning*¹⁹ *for the infinite*. There is nothing higher in the human being.

¹⁷ *ein Wissen dafür*.

¹⁸ *Transcriber's Note*: The feeling of the sublime needs no explanation. But all other feelings must be explained.

¹⁹ "Yearning" (*Sehnsucht*) is a quintessentially Romantic theme. It is a term of art, as it were, that is difficult to render in any language while capturing its unique polysemy. It is variously translated as "longing," "desire," and "yearning." It refers to an intense longing for something (which is the very definition of "yearning"), but an intense longing of a very specific kind: for something that may not be possible to attain or whose attainment is very uncertain. It is the subject of a poem of the same name by Friedrich Schiller as well as the poem "*Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt*" ("Only You Who Know Yearning Firsthand") by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe found in his novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The latter gives a good feel for the word:

Only you who know yearning firsthand
 Know of what I suffer!
 Alone and severed
 From all joy,

The feeling of the sublime happens in a flash. It arises suddenly and likewise disappears. This is not the case with our yearning for the infinite. It is *sedate* and *eternal*. Yearning differs from the ideal in virtue of something undetermined residing in it. It is, purely and simply, not bound to one ideal; it does not stand still at any ideal. Striving for the ideal is *an entirely individual affair*.²⁰ An idea, that is, *a whole in relation to the individual, provides an ideal*. Were someone to have *a striving* toward the ideal, and were this *striving* bound up with *a yearning for the infinite*, then that person would have a *sense*, that is, *love for everything ideal*. Were, however, someone's *yearning for the infinite* bound up with the *feeling of the sublime*, then this person would always want to have this feeling and it is this state that one should call "education."

(What one usually understands by "education" is cultivation or refinement.²¹ One should really reserve "education" for when speaking of the state described just now.)

Some of Plato's texts—the *Phaedo* is a superb example—are well suited to the task of triggering the yearning for the infinite within us. There are also some newer pieces as well. Take, for instance, the text *Speeches on Religion*,²² the author^{23,24} of which has chosen to remain anonymous.

I look into the firmament
To the yonder side.

Alas! The one who loves and knows me well
Is in the distance.
It makes my head spin; it sets aflame
My insides.
Only those who know yearning firsthand
Know of what I suffer.

²⁰ *individuell*.

²¹ In his 1784 essay "Concerning the Question 'What is Enlightenment?'" Moses Mendelssohn, too, claims that education (*Bildung*) is more than cultivation (*Kultur*) and also draws a connection between cultivation and refinement (*Politur*): "Education can be divided into cultivation or enlightenment. The former seems more concerned with the practical: with being gracious, being posh, and the beauty to be found in the arts and crafts and social customs (its objective dimension); and with skill, diligence, and ingenuity in the former, and a liking, drive, and propensity to engage in the latter (its subjective dimension). [...] Enlightenment, on the other hand, seems to refer more to the theoretical. It refers to rational cognition (its objective dimension) and skill (its subjective dimension) in reflecting rationally upon the matters of human life according to the measure of their importance and their influence on the vocation of humankind. [...] Cultivation, in its superficial appearance, is what we call refinement." *Berlinische Monatsschrift* 4 (1784): 194-195.

²² *Transcriber's Note*: There's also a text by Baader.

²³ *Transcriber's Note*: Schleiermacher.

²⁴ See *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, ed. and trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), in *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Hans-Joachim Birkner et al., I / 2

The yearning for the infinite has to always be a yearning. It cannot occur in the form of intuition. The ideal can never be intuited. The ideal is generated through speculation.

We have made our way back to the theorem itself. It runs: “All is in One and One is All.”

This is a theorem because it is the core of all theory. This expresses all the results that we, while we were solving the second problem, discovered through experimenting.

Conclusions to be drawn from this theorem.

Four *axioms* follow from this theorem.

Axiom I: “Principles are the transition from error to truth.”²⁵

All reality is the product of opposing elements. (One can now have no qualms in claiming that natural science, no matter the heights to which it believes it can rise, will not be able to discover a higher point to draw on than *dualism*. This is the purest and most extreme illusion and hence the principle of poesy.)

Duality is the character of all principles as far as matter goes: now, since both primordial elements likewise consist of two elements, the form of the principles will be a *quadruplicity*.

Axiom II: “Reality is only in ideas.”

Identity is the character of ideas. Hence, they are only an *expression*, a symbol. Their form will be *triplicity*. (You may notice this intermittently: our *method has to begin with reduction*. That’s why a system cannot begin with the spirit, but rather it can only begin with the letter.²⁶)

Axiom III: “All knowledge is symbolic.”

This axiom immediately follows from the second. Ideas can only be expressed symbolically.

Axiom IV: “All truth is relative.”

(Berlin / Walter de Gruyter, 1980–), 185–326). For Schlegel’s review of the text, see “Reden über die Religion,” *Athenaeum* 2, no. 2 (1799): 289–300.

²⁵ *Transcriber’s Note:* Principles take, as their starting point, *phenomena*, the *finite*, the *determined*.

²⁶ Later on in the lectures, the transcript gives more detail on this point: “How does *method* differ from *system*? Method is the *spirit* and system is the *letter*. / System is the *organization of philosophy*, method *its inner life force*. [...] By ‘system,’ one means nothing more than the following: ‘It is a scientific whole that is complete in itself.’” *Transcendental Philosophy*, 18.

Because, namely, all truth, as the old adage goes, always lies somewhere in the middle. And this is because all reality lies in the middle. — Truth is a product of the conflict of illusion. It arises from the strife of homogeneous errors.

Objections.

But—one could certainly raise the objection anyway—is not *the infinite* itself, then, a *complete fabrication*? Is it not some kind of *error*, *illusion*, or *misunderstanding*?

To this objection, we would give the following reply: Yes, it is a *complete fabrication*. But it is a complete fabrication that is purely and simply necessary. Our I has the tendency to approach the infinite and it is only due to the fact that the I, in a manner of speaking, surges forward to approach the infinite that the thought of the infinite even occurs to us.

But *any error* is automatically cleared up, since we take as our starting point ourselves *qua* midpoint,²⁷ and also come back to it again. How can one be making an error here? What about *an illusion*? It also cannot be that; for the infinite is One—you therefore just cannot mistake it.

This leaves considerable room for it being some kind of misunderstanding. But misunderstanding still presupposes truth.

It is also not the case that the ultimate ground of knowledge is *faith*.²⁸ Faith only occurs in those situations where we cannot know, where the reality of what we think cannot enter consciousness.

The following propositions follow from the axioms that have been established: “Philosophy is infinite, intensively as well as extensively” and “How philosophy is divided up is arbitrary.”

| 10 So, for example, Fichte’s philosophy can be broken down *into four parts*:

- 1.) The Doctrine of Science (i.e., the *Wissenschaftslehre*) in contrast to
- 2.) Moral Philosophy;
- 3.) Philosophy of Religion and
- 4.) Natural Law, *qua* postulate of practical reason.

The general schema of Fichtean philosophy would accordingly be a □.

Spinoza only has, in his philosophy, unity. He begins with the infinite (God) and likewise also ends with it.

The general schema of his philosophy would be a ○.

²⁷ *Transcriber’s Note*: The midpoint of our *being*, not of *individuality*, but rather in the most expansive sphere of reason.

²⁸ See note 16 above.

To be sure, we also do indeed come across *unity* in ancient Greek philosophy; but their philosophy is never self-contained.²⁹ Rather, it is the case that the infinite is, again and again, hinted at. We will come across all these divisions in our schema.

From the propositions “Philosophy is infinite” and “How it is divided up is arbitrary,” it emerges that the most complete system can only be an *approximation*—not of the ideal of philosophy in general, but rather of each one’s own ideal. (This is reminiscent of the *spirit* and *letter* of a system.) Every system begins with *reduction* and *analysis*. Reduction is the resolution of a complex of phenomena into singular phenomena.

If philosophy is infinite, then knowledge is also infinite; and, accordingly, there is only *one type of knowledge*, philosophical knowledge.³⁰ All knowledge is philosophical. It is an indivisible whole.

Something else follows from these axioms: *the fact that even skepsis is eternal*, just like philosophy is. But not *skepsis* as a *system*, but rather insofar as it pertains to philosophy. The idea of philosophy is only achievable through an infinite progression of systems. Its form is that of a cycle.³¹

If you would like to know how a circle could be described in terms of two opposing elements, you may think of the matter roughly along these lines: the center of the circle is the positive factor, the radius the negative one, and the peripheral point the point of indifference. Now, the positive factor in the point of indifference has a striving to unite with the positive factor in the center; by force of the negative factor, however, it cannot approach the center, but rather is made to merely drift around the center. Now, *enthusiasm* is the *center* and *skepsis*, the *radius*.

Enthusiasm must be *absolute*—that is to say, it is not permitted to let it diminish or certainly not to let it vanish altogether. The radius can grow into infinity. This thus goes for the degree of consciousness, *skepsis*, as well; the more it grows, the bigger becomes the periphery, that is, philosophy.

Of philosophy one could say what the Italian poet said of *God*: “Philosophy is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose periphery is nowhere.”³²

²⁹ *geschlossen*.

³⁰ *Transcriber’s Note*: Philosophy considers the soul, the midpoint of all knowledge.

³¹ The German for “cycle” (*Kreislauf*) contains the German word for “circle” (*Kreis*). The smooth transition to the next paragraph, which is facilitated by the linguistic connection between the terms, is preserved with “cycle” if one bears in mind that the word etymologically derives from the Greek “κύκλος” (*kuklos*, circle).

³² It is unclear to whom Schlegel is referring. He could mean Dante’s 1294 *The New Life* (*La Vita Nuova*), where we read: “I began to address him, saying: ‘Lord of all virtues, why do you weep?’ And he said these words to me: *Ego tanquam centrum circuli, cui simili modo se habent*

What is valid of philosophy as a whole is also valid in each part of it.

Philosophy deals with our *consciousness of the infinite*; if it considers the latter *unconscious*,³³ then it descends into the *deepest depths*; if it, however, considers it *with consciousness*, then it ascends to the highest heights, which only the human mind and spirit is capable of reaching.

The tendency of philosophy is to move toward the absolute.

The following two articles for philosophy come about as a result of this:

1. "A yearning for the infinite should be developed in all human beings."
2. "The surface appearance³⁴ of the finite should be annihilated"; and in order for that to happen, *all knowledge has to be in a state of revolution*.

Consciousness has a history. The return of the determined into the undetermined contains or constitutes its *different epochs*.

circumferentie partes; tu autem non sic ["I am like the center of a circle, equidistant from all"]." *Dante's Vita Nuova*, translated by Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 17-18. Whatever the case, the exact reference is from the *Book of Twenty-Four Philosophers* (*Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum*), a medieval text whose author is unknown and which contains twenty-four different definitions of God. The second runs: "God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (*Deus est sphaera infinita cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam*). There is no published English edition and translation, but there is a German (as well as French and Italian) version. See *Was ist Gott? Das Buch der 24 Philosophen*, trans. Kurt Flasch (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2011).

³³ *bewußtlos*.

³⁴ *Schein*.

Review Essays
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Window to Goethe's Colour Revolution

The Philosophy of Polarity in the *Farbenlehre*

*David W. Wood**

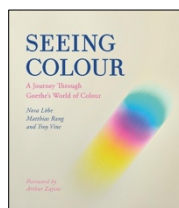
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Olaf L. Müller, *Ultraviolett. Johann Wilhelm Ritters Werk und Goethes Beitrag – Zur Geschichte einer Kooperation*, Wallstein Verlag, 2021, 625 pp. ISBN 978-3-8353-3978-1



Nora Löbe, Matthias Rang, Troy Vine, *Seeing Colour: A Journey Through Goethe's World of Colour*, Floris Books, 2022, 167 pp. ISBN 978-178250-780-2



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1. Revolutions



(Fig. 1: Goethean colour circle)

Uranie m'aiuti col suo coro¹

The opening pages of Goethe's 1810 scientific treatise on colour – *Zur Farbenlehre*² – critically compare his new theory to a number of revolutions. First, to the 1789 political revolution in France. For Goethe, the “Bastille” of Isaac Newton's intellectual edifice has now been stormed, with colour finally liberated from the physicist's darkened cell.³ Second, to the modern heliocentric revolution in astronomy, inaugurated by astronomers and thinkers like Copernicus, Galileo, and Giordano Bruno. Here again Newton's doctrine should be recognised as too limited and inverted for capturing the manifold manifestations of colour in the world. – It is like wanting to place the “moon at the centre” of our solar system instead of the sun.⁴

Conversely, Goethe appreciatively referred to the work of predecessors who had attempted more systematic overviews of chromatic phenomena, including the ancient Greek peripatetic philosophers, Aristotle and Theophrastus, and the Anglo-Irish chemist Robert Boyle.⁵ He also acknowledged the decisive encouragement of contemporaries like Friedrich Schiller⁶ or the Duchess Luise of Saxe-Weimar and Eisenach, to whom the work is dedicated.⁷

¹ Dante, *Purgatorio* 29, 41.

² J.W. Goethe, *Zur Farbenlehre*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Cotta, 1810). I'll cite this original edition (henceforth *Farbenlehre*, followed by volume number, date, and page number), and the abridged version in the Hamburger Ausgabe (= HA; Munich: Beck, vols. 13-14). For an English translation of the Didactic Part, see Goethe, *Scientific Studies*, trans. Douglas Miller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 157-298; for the Polemical Part, see: *Goethe's 'Exposure of Newton's Theory'*, trans. Michael Duck & Michael Petry (London: Imperial College Press, 2016). The Historical Part is not yet translated. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

³ Goethe, “Vorwort” (Preface), *Farbenlehre I* (1810: xix; HA 13: 319).

⁴ Goethe, “Einleitung” (Introduction), *Farbenlehre I* (1810: xxxvi; HA 13: 323).

⁵ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: xxxvi; HA 13: 323). Goethe also translated into German the small book “On Colours” by Aristotle/Theophrastus, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 24-53). Cf. his comments on Simon Portius's translation, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 197-200).

⁶ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 691, cf. 694; HA 14: 268).

⁷ See Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: viii; & vol II, 1810: 692; HA 13: 314, 524; HA 14: 269). The Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre* was already finished in 1808, and the dedication is dated: “Weimar, 30 January 1808.”

Zur Farbenlehre is triadic and divided into three main parts: Didactic, Polemical, and Historical. This triadic division and composition became clear to Goethe in 1800 during the period of observing the lunar phases and moon's surface relief with a Herschel telescope.⁸ Yet he also realized the work would need supplements, and in this regard the *Farbenlehre* as a whole closes with an epilogue that already presents certain supplementary material by the physicist Thomas Seebeck.⁹ It concerns coloured illumination relating to the musician-astronomer William Herschel's discovery of infrared light in 1800 and the use of Bologna *Leuchtstein* or baryte.¹⁰

The Historical Part of the *Farbenlehre* concludes with a remarkable but frequently overlooked autobiographical text: "Confession of the Author."¹¹ This scientific confession recounts a dramatic event in Goethe's life: how after returning from Italy he finally attained a conceptual breakthrough in the understanding of colour. In late 1789 Goethe had moved into new lodgings in the so-called Jägerhaus in Weimar (cf. Fig. 2).¹²



(Fig. 2: Large Jägerhaus in Weimar)

⁸ Goethe, *Tag- und Jahreshefte, als Ergänzung meiner sonstigen Bekenntnisse*, in: *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 31 (Stuttgart & Tübingen; Cotta, 1830, 87; passage not included in HA).

⁹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 693-724; cf. HA 13: 536). For further supplements, see among others: Goethe, "Zur Farbenlehre", in the first volume of his scientific journal *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt* (Stuttgart & Tübingen: Cotta, 1817), 9-32.

¹⁰ Goethe had personally collected his own samples of *Leuchtstein* from inside a hill near Paderno outside Bologna in 1786, See Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (HA 11: 110).

¹¹ Goethe, "Confession des Verfassers", *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 666-692; HA 14: 251-269).

¹² In the Marienstraße, near the Frauentor. – There are two associated dwellings called 'Jägerhaus' (hunter's house or hunting lodge) in Weimar, large and small. They housed a painting and drawing school. The family lived in the Jägerhaus from 1789-1792, and Goethe's son August was born in there on Christmas Day, 25 December 1789. The Marienstraße is named after the old Marienkirche (or Frauenkirche), which was formerly in the vicinity.

Due to this move and other work he did not get around to using some prisms he had earlier borrowed.¹³ A messenger arrived to take them back to their impatient owner. Before handing them over to the messenger, Goethe by chance decided to quickly glance through one of the prisms. He held the prism up to his eye and looked at the white walls of the room. No colours appeared. Turning around, Goethe directed his sight at the light coming through the window pane. He saw that colour was now generated. – Against the backdrop of the light-grey monotone sky, colour appeared most vividly on the cross bars of the window. This empirical prism experience gave rise to a sudden scientific insight, or what he would term an *aperçu*:

It did not need much reflection before I recognised that a boundary was necessary to produce colour, and I immediately said out loud to myself, as though instinctively: the Newtonian doctrine is false.¹⁴

Goethe's *aperçu* while looking at the window in Weimar occasioned a revolution in his thinking. Some initial essays on optics appeared in 1791-92, with the bulk of his investigations published twenty years later in *Zur Farbenlehre*. It is his largest written production: a 1,400-page, double-volume + booklet & plates, encyclopaedic study of colour.¹⁵

The encyclopaedism is visible in the work's relation to fields as diverse as physiology, physics, chemistry, mineralogy, music theory, linguistics, and painting, with paragraphs §§716-721 of the Didactic Part specifically addressing metaphysical issues. Here Goethe directed philosophers to study the Urphenomena (*Urphänomene*) – the first or archetypal phenomena. The work immediately piqued the interest of Goethe's philosophical contemporaries. These included the German idealists, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, as well as the young Arthur Schopenhauer. Over a century later Ludwig Wittgenstein would concur, finding the treatise “*very* instructive and philosophically interesting”¹⁶, spending his final years on colour studies, to

¹³ Goethe borrowed the prisms from the natural scientist Hofrat C.W. Büttner in Jena, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 676; HA 14: 257).

¹⁴ Goethe, “Confession des Verfassers”, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 678; HA 14: 259). On Goethe's discovery as an *aperçu* in “Confession”, see *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 684, 686; HA 14: 263, 264).

¹⁵ The 70-page booklet of engraved and illuminated plates with commentary was published concurrently in 1810 with the two main volumes. It includes an announcement and short *aperçu* of the entire project (cf. HA 13: 524-536).

¹⁶ Wittgenstein, letter of 19 January 1950 to Georg Henrik von Wright, cited in Andrew Lugg, *Wittgenstein's Remarks on Colour*, p. 20.

the mystification of his mentor Bertrand Russell.¹⁷ While the work played an indirect role in the great logician Kurt Gödel choosing his vocation.¹⁸

The three books here under review share this philosophical concern and trajectory. They are instructive and revolutionary in their own right, and continue the recent academic reassessment of Goethean colour science.¹⁹ In the case of the two books in German, a group of researchers headed by philosophy professor Olaf Müller (Humboldt University in Berlin), along with other associated scholars, are re-evaluating in an interdisciplinary manner the foundations of the *Farbenlehre* and their relation to the theories of the romantic scientist Johann Wilhelm Ritter.

Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität: Geschichte und Kontroversen (henceforth cited as “G”, followed by page number), edited by Anastasia Klug, Olaf L. Müller, Anna Reinacher, Troy Vine, and Derya Yürüyen, is a collection of eleven excellent essays, bookended by an introduction and afterword by Olaf Müller, focusing on the theory of polarity in the work of Goethe and Ritter. The first six essays are devoted to the reception of the *Farbenlehre* in Schelling, Oken, Schopenhauer, and others; the next five treat various controversies, such as edge spectra and the limits of colour symmetry. The essays by Brigitte Falkenburg (G: 229-250), Dietrich Zawischa (G: 251-267), and Jörg Friedrich (G: 268-296), are more critical of the Goethean conception of polarity in the field of optics (cf. Müller, G: 19-20). There are numerous high quality colour plates, graphs, and photographs at the end of the volume, as well as brief author bio-bibliographies and a name index. The different contributors mostly adopt philosophical approaches, but because of their multifaceted backgrounds they sometimes engage with other disciplines, such as theoretical physics, mathematics, history of science, technology, literature, and other permutations. Since the *Farbenlehre* is encyclopaedic, any multi-disciplinary approach should yield the most promising results, and this volume provides ample proof of that.

Olaf Müller's monograph *Ultraviolett: Johann Ritters Werk und Goethes Beitrag – Zur Geschichte einer Kooperation* (henceforth cited as “U”, followed by page number), builds on the historical, natural-scientific, and philosophical research in his earlier 2015 volume *Mehr Licht: Goethe mit*

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 174. Cf. Daniel Steuer, “Goethe and Wittgenstein on the Limits of Science: Towards a Critique of Abstraction”, *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 71 (2001): 52-57.

¹⁸ See Hao Wang, *Reflections on Kurt Gödel* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1987), 73; J. Dawson, *Logical Dilemmas: The Life and Work of Kurt Gödel* (Wellesley, MA: A.K. Peters, 1997), 18.

¹⁹ Building on the earlier colour research of Johannes Grebe-Ellis, Jutta Müller-Tamm, Matthias Rang, and Friedrich Steinle.

Newton im Streit um die Farben. This new book *Ultraviolett* is a highly readable, engaging, and precisely documented double-biography of Goethe and the romantic scientist J.W. Ritter, revolving around the Goethean background and inspiration for Ritter's discovery of ultraviolet light in 1801. It appears as volume 80 of the *Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, a series edited by Stefan Matuschek, who has also provided a foreword. *Ultraviolett* is divided into six chapters, each roughly one hundred pages in length. Chapter 1 concerns the background to the collaboration between Goethe and Ritter, with an emphasis on Goethe's theory of polarity and the fact that he almost discovered ultraviolet light himself (U: 21-109). The scientific rapprochement between the two protagonists, intellectually from early summer 1798, to their apparent first meeting in September 1800, is the next focus (U: 111-200). How Ritter's discovery of ultraviolet light was actually made out of the Goethean "spirit of polarity" is the topic of chapter 3 (U: 201-319). The possible origins of various tensions and disputes between Goethe and Ritter is then presented (U: 321-420). Titled "Getrennte Wege" (Separate Ways), chapter 5 describes their scientific split (U: 421-480). While the final chapter portrays how the two scientists began to approach one another again in 1808, before Ritter's untimely death in 1810 (U: 483-560). The volume finishes with a fifty-page bibliography (!) (U: 565-617) and 39 black and white or coloured images. One of the most fascinating threads in the book is Müller's portrait of Goethe and Ritter working on colour theory and the fluorescence of baryte, while in parallel Goethe is working on *Faust*. There is even a possible echo of Ritter's work on ultraviolet in the 1808 *Faust* edition (U: 387), while Müller furthermore deliciously traces numerous "literary mirrorings" (*literarische Spiegelungen*) between Ritter as Faust and Goethe as Mephisto (U: 377, 407-415). *Ultraviolett* will appeal to readers and scholars of Goethean and romantic science and philosophy and deserves a wide-readership.

Seeing Colour: A Journey Through Goethe's World of Colour (henceforth "SC", followed by page number) is a practical hands-on approach to learning about Goethe's colour theory. Written by the artist Dora Löbe, the physicist Matthias Rang, and the philosopher-physicist Troy Vine (one of contributors and editors of *Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität*), it has a foreword penned by Arthur Zajonc, emeritus professor of physics at Amherst College. The authors certainly haven't overlooked Goethe's scientific "Confession", with the key passage recounting Goethe's prism experience translated in the Introduction, while this aperçu is rightly explored via the nature of scientific revolutions in Galileo Galilei and Thomas Kuhn (SC: 11-15). The book similarly has quality colour plates and photographs supporting the text. What

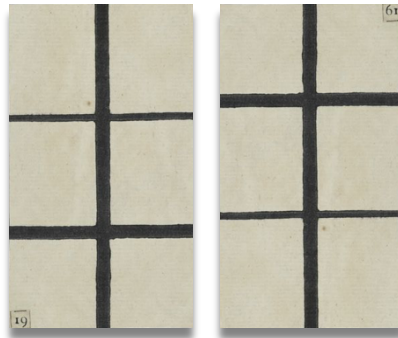
is most astonishing about this book is the incredible range and wealth of colour phenomena and experiments that are outlined and explained in its 167 pages. Among others: afterimages, complementary colours, successive and simultaneous contrasts, coloured shadows, opalescence, and prismatic, polarization, and interference colours, as well as Newton's rings, colour inversion experiments, colour mixing, and multicolour projection. The book also contains an English translation of Goethe's 1792 methodological essay: "The Experiment as Mediator Between Object and Subject", and ends with a more philosophical chapter on "The Order of Colours" (SC 119-127) and the highly informative "Bibliographic Essay on Goethean Approaches to Colour Science" (SC: 143-160). This accessible volume is unique in the English-language literature on Goethe and undoubtedly will be rewarding and enlightening not only for newcomers to his work but for seasoned scholars alike.

Since it isn't possible to cover in-depth all the findings in these three intellectually rich publications, in the next section 2 of this piece I'll briefly focus on the *philosophy* of polarity. In an empirical and metaphysical sense, what is Goethe's idea of polarity? Here I'm also inspired by a passage in the Historical Part of the *Farbenlehre*: "To be instructed in the theory of colour a person has at least to criss-cross the history of natural science and not neglect the history of philosophy."²⁰ Unfortunately I cannot cover all the contributors, but I'll look at how certain of them and Goethe tackle and answer this question in relation to philosophy.

And because this is a review essay, I'll put forward some of my own views. Specifically, in the much longer section 3, I'll move beyond the confines of a review and conclude with a method for more accurately dating Goethe's prism aperçu. The exact date of this insight remains an unresolved issue in the research. However, I'll show that it precisely the principle of polarity that furnishes the basis for the most satisfying solution to this problem.

²⁰ "Um sich von der Farbenlehre zu unterrichten, mußte man die ganze Geschichte der Naturlehre wenigstens durchkreuzen und die Geschichte der Philosophie nicht außer acht lassen." Goethe, *Farbenlehre* (1810 II: vi; HA 14: 7-8).

2. What is Polarity?



(Fig. 3: Goethe, 1791 optics card no. 19.
Left, card as presented in *Beyträge I*; right, same card, but inverted)

a) *Urphenomena*

We saw the *Farbenlehre* especially directs the attention of the philosopher to the *Urphenomena*. But what does Goethe understand by this complex notion? As the prefix *Ur* implies, they are phenomena related to *origins*, to the *Urquellen*²¹ – the original or archetypal sources. In this regard, the *Urphenomena* play a mediating role between the real and the ideal.²² Goethe underscores this point in his discussions with the philosopher J.G. Herder. At the time, Herder was working on the *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity), part one of which was published in 1784.²³ Goethe writes:

Like I had earlier sought the *Urpflanze* (archetypal plant), so now I attempted to find the *Urtier* (archetypal animal), which ultimately means nothing else than: the concept, the idea of the animal. My laborious and tortuous research was relieved, even sweetened, when Herder undertook the *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Humanity*. Our daily conversations concerned the *Uranfängen* (archetypal beginnings) of the water earth and the organic creatures that originally emerged on it. This *Uranfang* (archetypal beginning) and its incessant continuing development was constantly discussed and daily explained and enriched, becoming our scientific possession through reciprocal communications and battles.²⁴

²¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: xlv; HA 13: 327).

²² For an excellent recent article on Goethe's view of the *Urphenomena*, see Sebastian Meixner, "Urphänomen (Original/Primordial Phenomenon)", *Goethe-Lexicon of Philosophical Concepts* vol. 2, no. 1 (Dec. 2022).

²³ Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Erster Teil, (Riga & Leipzig: Hartknoch, 1784).

²⁴ Goethe, "Der Inhalt bevorwortet" (1817) (HA 13: 63).

It is striking to note the extent to which Goethe employs the *Ur*-prefix here, how he depicts the two extremes in feeling aroused by their efforts, and his insistence that he and Herder share these views in common. This passage illustrates the twofold nature of the *Urphenomena*: on one hand, they are the *first*, original, archetypal, most basic (*Grund*) phenomena²⁵, also called the main appearances (*Haupterscheinungen*)²⁶; and on the other hand, they are the *ideas* of the empirical manifestations. When Goethe employs *Ur* his meaning may even extend to the cosmological, back to universe's earliest beginnings. For Herder begins the *Ideen* by narrating the primeval origins of the cosmos based on the latest astronomical discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, and Huygens.²⁷ With this cosmological beginning, Herder is following in the footsteps of his former teacher Kant. Herder places the latter alongside these astronomers in the *Ideen*, specifically referencing Kant's 1755 *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels* (Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens) as a book that should be more well-known than it is.²⁸ Kant had begun his own cosmogony in that text by positing the existence of an *Urstoff* or archetypal matter, as well as two original and archetypal attractive and repulsive forces, based on the mechanical principles of Newton's natural philosophy:

It is with the greatest care that I have indeed relinquished all arbitrary inventions. I have, after I placed the world in the simplest chaos, made use of no forces other than those of attraction and repulsion to develop the great order of nature, two forces which are equally certain, equally simple, and equally original and universal (*zwei Kräfte, welche beide gleich gewiss, gleich einfach und zugleich gleich ursprünglich und allgemein sind*). They have both been borrowed from Newtonian philosophy.²⁹

In other words, Kant begins with Newton and the *Urphenomena*. For Goethe, the philosopher's task with regard to the *Farbenlehre* is not to replace the work of the physicist or chemist, but to complement it by more sharply conceptualizing the idea and manifestations of colour itself. The section on philosophy in the *Farbenlehre* presents a necessary circle from the real to the

²⁵ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, § 174 (1810: 66; HA 13: 367).

²⁶ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, § 174 (1810: 66; HA 13: 367).

²⁷ Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784), 3-4.

²⁸ Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784), 4, footnote.

²⁹ Kant, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels, oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes nach Newtonischen Grundsätzen abgehandelt* (Königsberg & Leipzig: Johann Friederich Petersen, 1755), Preface (unpaginated). (AA I: 234). Kant's book first appeared anonymously. English translation by Olaf Reinhardt in: Immanuel Kant, *Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 204.

ideal worlds in the Goethean conception of science: “The philosopher is a borrower, for he takes a last element out of the physicist’s hand, which then becomes a first element for himself.”³⁰

In *Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität*, Anastasia Klug characterizes the nature of the *Urphenomena*, arguing that it is not in any way an unclear or “abstract principle”, but something that directly relates to the empirical and physical world (G: 188). In fact, this is the reason why Schopenhauer rejected and redefined Goethean polarity in the retina of the eye (G: 187-190). Drawing attention to the key paragraph §175 on the *Urphenomena* in the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre*, she points out that opposition (*Gegensatz*) and polarity for Goethe can be traced back to the sphere of art, especially to warm and cold colours. Here blue is closely affiliated with darkness and yellow with light, a polarity that Schopenhauer takes over and modifies (G: 187-188). Klug’s chapter is an illuminating contribution to the Goethe-Schopenhauer relationship with regard to the polarity of the retina and the philosophy of colour perception. Fully in the Goethean spirit of the *Urphenomena* as the highest and ultimate, Müller concludes his Goethe-Ritter monograph *Ultraviolett* by leading the reader up to the cusp of this difficult topic. In fact, it becomes the final sentence and word of Müller’s entire text: “Goethe sprach in solchen Situationen vom Urphänomen” (In these kinds of situations, Goethe spoke of Urphenomena) (U: 562). We share Müller’s opinion that with the *Urphenomena* we reach a limit and the subject therefore remains highly *rätselhaft* – mysterious or enigmatic (U: 418).

In the foreword to the book *Seeing Colour*, Arthur Zajonc reminds us that *Urphenomena* are fundamentally painterly. He points to the fact that Goethe’s ideas on *Urphenomena* in the world of nature, such as bright red-orange sunsets or the pale blue sky, were taken up by artists themselves (SC: 7-8). We’ll come back to this point in a moment.

b) *Urpolarität* - Urpolarity

What was the chief scientific goal of Goethe’s *Farbenlehre*? – To introduce the principle of polarity into chromatics. The author explicitly states this in §757 of the Didactic Part³¹, as well as in the scientific “Confession” when talking about his original aperçu.³² While the 1810 *Anzeige und Übersicht* provides a further succinct overview of this scientific intention:

³⁰ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §720 (1810: 268; HA 13: 483).

³¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §757 (1810: 286; HA 13: 493).

³² Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 685; HA 14: 264).

In short, it aims to study the chromatic phenomena in connection with the other physical phenomena, especially to place them into a series with what the magnet and tourmaline teach us, what electricity, galvanism, and chemical processes reveal to us, and hence through terminology and method to prepare a more perfect unity of physical knowledge. It will be shown that in colour, like in the other cited natural phenomena, there occurs a hither (*hüben*) and yonder (*driüben*), a division and union, an antithesis, an indifference, that is to say: a polarity (*Polarität*). And indeed, in a sense that is high, manifold, decisive, instructive, and furthering.³³

Goethe's goal therefore is a "more perfect unity of physical knowledge." To attain this goal he strives to arrange colour phenomena into a series with some of the main examples of polarity found in the natural world, such as the north-south polarity of magnetic forces in an iron magnet, or the unusual positive and negative electricity in the tourmaline stone.

The first 100 §§ of the section on physiological colours systematically set forth a different ordering and conception of the chromatic phenomena compared to Newton's *Optics*. Number §1 states that the physiological colours belong to the eye of the subject and therefore "constitute the foundation of the entire theory and reveal the chromatic harmony."³⁴ They called physiological because they belong to the ordinary "healthy eye"³⁵ as opposed to an unhealthy eye with cataracts or colour blindness. They are not malevolent spirits.³⁶ In contrast to the polarity in the inorganic sphere of magnetism and electricity in the tourmaline stone, the foundation of polarity in Goethe's colour theory is based on the 'higher' *organic* sphere: on the "reciprocal and living interaction" between the subject and object, the inner and outer worlds (§3).³⁷ Here in §§1-3 we already have a number of fundamental polarities: between the healthy and ill eye, between the inorganic and organic spheres, etc.

In his Introduction to the volume *Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität*, Olaf Müller underscores the importance of the principle of polarity for the Weimar poet-scientist, declaring that this principle did not remain just one scientific law among many for Goethe, but that polarity almost assumed for him the role of a cosmic or "World Formula" (*Weltformel*) (G: 11). He also relates

³³ Goethe, *Anzeige und Uebersicht des Goethischen Werkes zur Farbenlehre*, published in June 1810 in *Morgenblatt*; reprinted in Goethe, *Erklärung zur Goethe's Farbenlehre zugehörigen Tafeln* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1810: 1; HA 13: 524).

³⁴ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §1 (1810: 1; HA 13: 329).

³⁵ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §3 (1810: 2; HA 13: 330).

³⁶ "schädliche Gespenster", Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §1 (1810: 1; HA 13: 329).

³⁷ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §3 (1810: 2; HA 13: 330).

how the deeper understanding of polarity had enormous consequences: fruitfully leading to the use of magnets in compasses and navigation, especially at sea. Or William Gilbert’s 1600 discovery that the earth is a giant magnet, with two magnetic poles, which do not entirely coincide with the geographic north and south poles (G: 16-20).

However, Müller rightly raises the issue of the limits of polarity, asking whether we are still within the domain of science if we extend the concept of polarity to other pairs, such as male/female, or good/evil etc. He notes that an “undisciplined misuse” of polarity might result not in scientific research, but rather in “ideology” (G: 15). In fact, polarity properly-speaking is no longer considered a scientific principle today. Hence, it is a key point: how universal is the principle of polarity? And how does it differ from symmetry, inversion, reflection or mirroring, reversals, parallelisms, or the principle of reciprocity? Many of these issues are discussed in the volume *Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität*, and it is noted that by means of *analogy* it is possible to heuristically apply polarity to many other domains of inquiry (G: 14-15).

It is worth recalling that Goethe himself was fully aware of the pitfalls of arbitrarily universalizing the principle of polarity. The primary models of polarity cited by Goethe throughout the *Farbenlehre* are those found in natural physical phenomena, such as the north and south poles in iron magnets, positive and negative forces in electricity, or attractive and repulsive forces in nature, etc.

The primacy of these natural-scientific models is confirmed in §696 of the Didactic Part, which furnishes a general list of polarities in two columns. Goethe writes: “Viewed in general, colour diverges into two sides. It presents an opposition, which we can name polarity and designate rather well by a + and –.”³⁸ Here the colours yellow and blue form a polarity, as well as light and shadow. Goethe’s full list of polarities in §696 is:

<i>Plus</i>	<i>Minus</i>
yellow	blue
light	shadow
brightness	darkness
strong	weak
warmth	coldness
closeness	distance
repulsion	attraction
relation to acids	relation to alkalis ³⁹

³⁸ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §696 (1810: 259; HA 13: 478).

³⁹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §696 (1810: 259; HA 13: 478).

Again, in the lower part of this list we see that the forces of “repulsion” and “attraction” found in magnetic phenomena belong to Goethe’s scientific concept of polarity. The magnet itself even becomes an *Urphenomenon* for Goethe. Indeed, in the “Foreword” to the *Farbenlehre* the magnetized metal iron is a microcosmic reflection of the macrocosm, since “in its smallest parts we are able to perceive what happens in the entire mass.”⁴⁰ Hence, when Goethe speaks in 1792 of a Kantian-aligned “Urpolarity of all being” (*Urpolarität aller Wesen*)⁴¹, I would argue he is especially referring to Kant’s above text, the *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*. Just as Kant moves from the phenomena to the *Urphenomena*, Goethe similarly moves from ‘ordinary’ polarity in magnets and tourmaline to *Urpolarity* or the archetypal phenomenon of polarity itself. Everything seems to have an essential polarity for Goethe, including the human being.

Nevertheless, though Goethe recommends a broader extension of polarity beyond the field of natural science in the *Farbenlehre*, it is often as an analogy, allegory, or as a “symbolic language of nature”, and not as blind mysticism or a rigid scientific law to be wielded in every sphere.⁴² Goethe stresses that the concept of polarity already contains an opposition and a unity: polarity necessarily implies the existences of two distinct poles in one object. Hence, all polarity “reveals an elementary unity.”⁴³ A magnet has two poles, but it still remains united with itself, as one magnet or one object. Similarly, on a larger scale: the earth remains a single unity and one earth, despite having two magnetic poles.

An extremely influential approach to better understanding Goethe’s idea of polarity and how to integrate it into contemporary scientific notions is Olaf Müller’s proposal to see it as a form of *symmetry inversion*, where the opposites can be interchanged or inverted, a *Vertauschungsoperation*. Müller states: “Where polarity reigns, there is therefore an operation of symmetry inversion. Polarity is a special kind of symmetry (Polarität ist eine spezielle Art von Symmetrie.)” (U: 556). There is especially a fundamental symmetry between light, darkness, and colour. According to Müller, true polarity has four aspects: i). “exactly two factors are opposed to each other”, and these two factors b). “condition (*bedingen*) each other”, c). or they can “reciprocally

⁴⁰ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, Vorwort (1810: xi) (HA 13: 315).

⁴¹ This discussion occurs in the autobiographical text *Campaign in France*. It is with the Platonic Münster circle devoted to Hemsterhuis’s works. See Goethe, *Campagne in Frankreich* (HA 10: 314).

⁴² Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, Vorwort (1810: xii-xiii; HA 13: 316).

⁴³ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §453 (1810: 174; HA 13: 431).

cancel each other out” and hence, should be viewed as “antitheses” (*Gegensätze*), and d). they exhibit a certain form of symmetry. (G: 16). At the conclusion of *Ultraviolet*, Müller explains this conception of polarity and symmetry in even more detail (U: 531-560). Müller thinks that Goethe’s idea of polarity functions in a manner similar to the idea of symmetry inversion in modern physics (G: 92). However, other contributors do not entirely agree with him here, and do not find a total equivalence between this idea of symmetry between light and darkness in particular. For Brigitte Falkenburg, Müller has a “non-standard optics of darkness, which in Hegel’s eyes would not be better than Newton’s ontology of coloured light rays and light atoms” (G: 245). In *Ultraviolet*, Müller states that he absolutely does not want to apply polarity to any sort of religious or political sphere (U: 541), and is even hesitant about treating it as a philosophical idea *per se* (U: 542). As a non-biologist, he wisely chooses to leave the question of the role of polarity in biology to other more qualified people (U: 543). His preference is physics and chemistry, the experimental domain, where the polarity between the forces of attraction and repulsion plays a central role (U: 549, 553).

One of the most interesting and fascinating topics in all three books is the fact that Goethe was convinced that there was an opposite or polar spectrum to Newton’s spectrum, in which the traditional colour spectrum is replaced with a spectrum of complementary colours. Instead of sending light through a small hole in a window shutter, Goethe conceived of the inverted or symmetrical process. As *Seeing Colours* puts it: “Goethe was not convinced of Newton’s argument. He had discovered that spectra occur not only with light sources, such as the sun, but also with dark shadows in light surroundings. What would Newton’s spectrum look like if the sun were dark in a dazzling light universe?” (SC: 91). The book cover of *Seeing Colours* above on page 471 provides a colour reproduction of this inverted Goethe spectrum.

But how to get from the domain of inorganic polarity to that of organic polarity, and even up to the human being? We could start with the plant. For Hubert Schmidleitner, Goethe’s intuitive *Urpflanze* is a promising conceptual tool for the organic world (G: 206-207), recalling that parallel to colour theory Goethe was still working on morphology. Here Schmidleitner’s article raises a delicate issue – to what extent is the concept of polarity already present in the period of the *Metamorphosis of Plants*? (G: 207-208).

c) *Urversuch* – The Archetypal Experiment

Troy Vine’s chapter “Goethes Newton-Kritik als interne Kritik” on the methodology of the *Farbenlehre* is outstanding (G: 31-58). He calls it an

internal critique because Goethe actually follows Newton's own methods and arguments and exposes the shortcomings of them. It banishes many misconceptions and prejudices about Goethe's lack of knowledge of the mathematical procedures of analysis and synthesis (G: 49-52), or that Goethe was ignorant of Newton's experimental optics as such. Goethe is not slavishly defended, on the contrary, he is shown to have fully understood Newton's distinction between hypothesis and theory. Goethe criticizes Newton precisely for failing to have adhered to his own distinction, and rejects Newton's view that his *experimentum crucis* shows that light is composed of coloured rays, because it remains at the level of a mere hypothesis (G: 33-35, 46-51). Newton's *experimentum crucis* is one of his most fundamental experiments, and Goethe attacks this fundament at its empirical and theoretical root.

An intellectually and aesthetically pleasing article in *Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität*, is Hubert Schmidleitner's "Über eine Ungereimtheit in Goethes Beschreibung der Kantenspektren" (205-228), which also places Goethe's ideas in the milieu of his intellectual conversations with Herder (G: 206-212). Schmidleitner plays close attention to a rightly neglected aspect of Goethe's *Farbenlehre*, the early set of cards accompanying the 1791 *Beiträge*. One can only follow his arguments with keen interest, especially when he wittily terms these cards: "Choreographie der Anschauung oder rein optische Kartenspiel" (Choreography of Intuition or Pure Optical Card Games) (G: 211). He rightly maintains that these cards should be used practically, to carry out concrete experiments with a prism. In this way, the cards are surveyed intuitively (using *Anschauung*) or as a totality, and Schmidleitner helpfully provides an image of them as a correctly ordered set (G: 212). He compares them with tables from the *Farbenlehre* (G: 213-225) – exactly the perfect approach in my view. Importantly, Schmidleitner considers these pairs of cards in the light of Goethe's own designations, where he had conceived them as "zwei Pole" (two poles) and in "Gegensatz" (opposition) to each other (G: 218). The extent to which the concept of polarity can already be found in these 1791 cards is a basic question for him. These cards are for the most part presented by Goethe in integral pairs, with several curious exceptions, e.g. cards 19 and 23. Hence, we can agree with and make plural the title of Schmidleitner's article that there exist certain "*Ungereimtheiten*" (inconsistencies) in this card game. But can some of them at least be made more consistent?

As the name implies, the Didactic Part of the 1810 *Farbenlehre* seeks to instruct the learner into the foundations of Goethe's theory. Starting with the organic or living human eye, the phenomena of colour are classified into three

main types: physiological, physical, and chemical. The 1791-92 *Contributions to Optics* already had a similar pedagogical purpose. As mentioned, this short text was accompanied by a prism and a set of cards with images to encourage readers to generate the colour insights for themselves. Or as Goethe writes in the “Confession of the Author”, their purpose was so that “the aperçu could be brought forth in someone else’s spirit just as it had so livingly worked in mine.”⁴⁴ This seems to be meant literally, as card number 19 (Fig. 3) is a picture based on the upside-down window of a house.⁴⁵ Indeed, the 1791 text itself directly relates card number 19 to the experience of seeing colours on the cross bars of a window.⁴⁶ The card can be turned diagonally, to become a “St. Andrew’s Cross”, according to Goethe. As presented in the *Beiträge*, it has the form of a Petrine Cross, but turning it upside down brings it back to the image of the classical Christian cross. This card 19 is often considered as isolated and without a pair in the 1791 series. But just the eye creates a complementary image in its striving for totality, or produces a complementary colour, so the complementary image for this card is to be found in itself, since card 19 is symmetrical. As a consequence, by inverting card 19 and using a prism the reader can have a colour experience similar to the one Goethe had when looking at the window in the Jägerhaus in Weimar.

This basic window experiment in the *Contributions to Optics* forms a further direct symmetry with the presentation of the physiological colours in the *Farbenlehre*. Starting at paragraph number §19 the reader is introduced to successive and simultaneous image contrasts, and the main repeated experiment is one based on looking at the cross bars of a window.⁴⁷ In the observer, this results in the polar alternation of a light or dark cross generated by the organic physiology of the eye.⁴⁸ While in §61 of the Didactic Part, Goethe defends a conception of colour totality and colour harmony, in which the researcher circles and “returns back to the point” from which they started. This paragraph number §61 is identical to the perceived number 61 on the inverted card in the *Contributions*. Thus, the window experiment can be termed Goethe’s *Urversuch* or original colour experiment. “Everything

⁴⁴ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II*, “Confession des Verfassers” (1810: 686; HA 14: 264).

⁴⁵ The fact that card 19 is based on an inverted house window is known in the research. For instance, see Robin Rehm, “Bild und Erfahrung. Goethes chromatisches Kartenspiel der *Beiträge zur Optik* von 1791”, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 72 (2009): 508-510.

⁴⁶ See *Beiträge zur Optik* 1 (1791), 37-40.

⁴⁷ See §§19-40, §80, §§90-91, Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 7-15, 35, 38-39; HA 13: 333-337, 350, 352).

⁴⁸ See §20, §29, §31, Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 7, 10-11; HA 13: 333-335).

depends on the primary or original experiments (*Urversuche*), and the chapter that is built on them stands secure and solid."⁴⁹

d) *Urfarben* – Archetypal Colours

Goethe underscores in the Introduction to the *Farbenlehre* that colour belongs in a natural series of polarity:

Colour is an elementary natural phenomenon for the sense of the eye. Like the other phenomena, it manifests itself in division and opposition, in mixture and union, in elevation and neutralization, in communication and diffusion, etc., and can be best observed and understood using these general natural formulae.⁵⁰

However, colour can not only be understood using natural formulae, but also by deploying *philosophical* expressions. This is a crux for Goethe. In line with the philosophical *Urphenomena*, Goethe speaks of *Urfarben* – “all colours can be reduced to three colours”, the three primary colours, which have long been known.⁵¹

Philosophical formulations are more general or universal than mere natural ones: “In order to generate colour, we require light and darkness, brightness and darkness, or if one wishes to employ a more universal formula: light and non-light (*Licht und Nichtlicht*).”⁵² This is because the *Farbenlehre* seeks to articulate higher or more encyclopaedic connections, as it were, and cannot confine itself solely to the domains of physics and chemistry. Goethe explains this towards the end of the Didactic Part, in the chapter on the relationship between the theory of colour and general physics:

We found an archetypal (*uranfänglich*) and enormous antithesis between light and darkness, which can be more universally expressed by light and non-light (*Licht und Nichtlicht*); we sought to mediate this antithesis and thereby to build a visible world out of light, shadow, and colour. While developing the phenomena, we employed various formulae, which are traditionally drawn from the theories of magnetism, electricity, and chemistry. But we had to go further, because we found ourselves in a higher region and had to express more manifold relationships.⁵³

⁴⁹ Goethe, “Betrachtungen im Sinne der Wanderer”, *Werke*, vol. 22 (Stuttgart & Tübingen: Cotta, 1829), 260.

⁵⁰ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, “Einleitung” (1810: xxxix; HA 13: 324-325).

⁵¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 549; HA 14: 201).

⁵² Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, “Einleitung” (1810: xli-xlii; HA 13: 326).

⁵³ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §744 (1810: 279; HA 13: 489).

In the paragraph §69 on coloured shadows in the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe draws attention to a crucial aspect of colour. He characterizes colour as “Schattiges”, as something shadow-like, shadowy, or mixed with shade:

Here an important consideration appears to which we will often return. Colour itself is something shadowy (*skieron*), which is why Kircher was perfectly correct in calling it *lumen opacatum*, and because it is related to shadow, it tends to join itself with it ...⁵⁴

This use of the Greek word *skieron* is unusual, but as Olaf Müller recalls, it underscores Goethe’s view of colour as an admixture of both light and darkness and not just solely light (U: 508). The root of this word is *skia*, a word indeed signifying shadow or shade, and certain scholars see a philosophical connection with Plato’s cave allegory.⁵⁵ But just as shade in English not only refers to the shadow of a large object, but still has a literary connotation with deceased souls, so too the root of this word. It can be found in an *Urbuch* in the canon of Western literature, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, when in Book 11 Odysseus descends to the underworld, and encounters there the spirits or shades of the dead. With this shade-like element of colour we see how the *Farbenlehre* can pass into the domain of poetry and literature, as Goethe himself already seems to attempt in §§75-78 of the Didactic Part. The experience of coloured shadows while descending from the Brocken in the Harz Mountains is described as like entering a “*Feenwelt*” or fairy-tale world.⁵⁶ The Brocken of course makes a further literary appearance in *Faust*.

The transition from colour to the domain of painting follows a similar path via the nature of colour as something shade-like. Even more: the very origins of the art of painting appear to be connected with shadows too:

According to Pliny’s assertion, all the oldest traditions agree that painting actually began with the outline of the shadow of the human being; under the proviso that it wasn’t probably real shadows or silhouette figures but rather the first lineal attempts at drawing a shape on a surface: for this indeed is the most elementary component of painting.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 34; HA 13: 346).

⁵⁵ For instance, see Helga W. Kraft, “Goethes *Farbenlehre* und *Das Märchen*. Farbmagic oder –wissenschaft?”, in: *Die Farben imaginierte Welten*, Monika Schausten (ed.) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 97.

⁵⁶ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 32-34; HA 13: 348-349).

⁵⁷ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 70).

Hence, the first image or *Urbild* in painting appears to have arisen from the shadow of the human figure. As a student of painting in Italy Goethe similarly emphasized the significance of the human form as an object of artistic knowledge: "I have now grasped the human figure, the alpha and omega of everything known to us."⁵⁸

In the history of art, a window is often viewed as the frame of a painting, as Goethe was aware from his study of Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting*, and from living with painters during his years in Italy.⁵⁹ Some of the earliest origins of Goethe's interest in colour can be traced back to his musings on Leonardo's theory of the blue sky, as the painter and colour researcher Hubert Schmidleitner helpfully recalls (G: 207-209). *Seeing Colour* also shows the enduring fruitfulness of Goethe's colour theory for understanding the works of painters such as van Gogh, J.M.W. Turner, and Georges Seurat (SC: 8-11; 81, 108-109, 115, 144). So when Goethe glanced through the prism and saw colour on the window bars in Weimar, or when he created artistic cards to generate this same aperçu in others, there is not merely a scientific component to this event, but without doubt an aesthetic one as well. As such, this aperçu requires a practised artistic eye to fully grasp it. Or as Goethe calls it in Venice in 1786: "seeing with the eye of the painter."⁶⁰

A complete circle can be traced in Goethe's work by means the definition of colour as shadow or shade-like in §69. Colour passes from the poetic-literary sphere, to the earliest beginnings of painting, to the coloured shadows in the physiological section of the *Farbenlehre*. It is a path that Goethe personally traversed:

And so I had, without really noticing it, landed in a foreign field, by moving from poetry to the fine arts, and from the fine arts to natural science ... I found the fortunate path back to art again via the physiological colours and through their ethical and aesthetic effects in general. (HA 14: 267).

Apart from Goethe's reference to Plotinus's philosophy in the *Farbenlehre*, where exactly to place Goethe's worldview that includes the *principle of polarity* in the history of philosophy? Goethe himself traces the first tentative beginning of such a worldview that strives at unification back to Frankfurt around 1769, when reading books like *Aurea Catena Homerii* (The Golden Chain of Homer), which posited an interconnected organic cosmos of higher

⁵⁸ Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (HA 11: 386).

⁵⁹ Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (HA 11: 517).

⁶⁰ Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (HA 11: 86).

and lower forces. The subtitle of the book is the *annulus platonis*, or the Rings of Plato. Plato's dialogue *Ion* explains how the chain of inspiration from Homer to a poet on the stage, is similar to an interlinked chain of magnetized iron rings:

This is not an art in you, whereby you speak well on Homer, but a divine power, which moves you like that in the stone which Euripides named a magnet, but most people call 'Heraclea stone'. For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed a quite long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended from one another.⁶¹

Hence, based on the pivotal nature of the magnet in the *Farbenlehre*, the Platonic stream could be one ancient philosophical tradition that Goethe had in mind. Moreover, in light of Goethe's insistence on a higher unity to polarity than the one found in magnets or tourmaline, another tradition could be Giordano Bruno's principle of the reconciliation of opposites. Bruno's principle is mentioned in Jacobi's 1789 edition of his Spinoza book, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*.⁶²

Lastly, there is of course the Herderian, Kantian, and Hemsterhuisian traditions, which Goethe explicitly mentions. However, there is another contemporary philosopher whose work appears to be connected with the foundations of the *Farbenlehre* but is often overlooked: Johann Gottlieb Fichte. As a few earlier historians of philosophy have noted, such as Eckart Förster⁶³, Goethe's above unusual polar formulation of "light and non-light" (*Licht und Nichtlicht*) on the one hand, and the method of mediating between antitheses on the other, the *Farbenlehre* seems to express the same philosophical spirit as Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Like Kant, Fichte sees a polarity in the natural world between centrifugal and centripetal forces. Like Bruno and Hemsterhuis, he seeks a reconciliation of two opposing forces. These same forces are present in human striving and interactions, and the philosopher seeks in cognition to overcome dualities of these kinds via the power of the creative imagination. Hence, the I (*Ich*) strives to know itself and everything that is not part of the I, the Not-I (*Nicht-Ich*), and to reconcile

⁶¹ Plato, *Statesman, Philebus, Ion*. Greek with translation by Harold N. Fowler and W.R.M. Lamb, Loeb Classical Library, 164 (Harvard University Press, 1925), 421.

⁶² See Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Löwe, 1789), 304-309.

⁶³ Among others, see Eckart Förster, "Da geht der Mann dem wir alles verdanken!" Ein Untersuchung zum Verhältnis Goethe-Fichte", *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 45 (1997): 331-344.

all polarities or antitheses between itself and the world through the imagination, which ultimately manifests itself as the light (*Licht*) of the spirit (*Geist*).⁶⁴ In other words, Goethe is pointing to the complementarity between the three main principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the foundation of the *Farbenlehre*.

After these reflections on the philosophical nature of the *Urphenomena* and polarity, we will now turn to an unresolved problem in the scholarship on the *Farbenlehre*.

3. The Prism Aperçu



(Fig. 4, left, Faust engraving attributed to the Dutch Painter Rembrandt 1652; right, version by J.H. Lips for Goethe's 1790 *Faust* edition.)

When exactly did Goethe have his prism aperçu? Or to invoke *kairos*, an idea from ancient Greek philosophy and culture, on what date did the opportune moment occur that sparked Goethe's intensive research into optics and colour? To be fair, the three volumes under review do not at all have this dating question as their main focus. They are of course not to be criticized for that. On the contrary, as we saw, their choice of the topic of polarity is an extremely judicious and fruitful one. I would like to show that this topic can be extended to other contested issues in the *Farbenlehre*, especially the problem of dating Goethe's prism aperçu. From this point on I will now mostly move beyond a review of these books.

It appears that Goethe intentionally presented his prism aperçu in an enigmatic manner as a riddle for the research; yet as a rationally open riddle, not as a closed or impossible one, in line with his conviction of "open mysteries" in nature, science, and art.⁶⁵ In cases of this kind, we usually don't

⁶⁴ On the Ich, Nicht-Ich, and the imagination, see: J.G. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (Weimar, 1794/95).

⁶⁵ On Goethe's view of "problems" and "open mysteries" (*offenbare Geheimnisse*) in science, nature, and art, see among others, Goethe, "Probleme" (1823) (HA 13: 35-37).

see that the solution itself is openly present before our eyes, until we have dispensed with preconceptions, gathered enough experience, appropriately ordered the material, adopted a suitable approach, or asked the right question.

In *Ultraviolett*, Olaf Müller acknowledges that the precise dating of this prism experience still remains an unsolved problem in the scholarship: “Among experts on Goethe’s colour research it is disputed whether Goethe had already begun to assail Newton’s optics in the year 1790 or only first in the following year. With strong arguments Wenzel dates the beginning of this investigation to the 17.5.1791.”⁶⁶ Müller points out how scholars like Manfred Wenzel bolster support for the year 1791 by calling upon a private letter of Goethe to the Duke Carl August. In this letter of 17 May 1791, Goethe writes that he had reduced multiple colour phenomena to the “simplest principle.” Müller finds “plausible” Wenzel’s contention that the “simplest principle” is a reference to the principle of polarity, but judges “less plausible” the short time span for both the prism aperçu and such a complex reduction (U: 68).

In *Goethe, Ritter und die Polarität*, Hubert Schmidleitner advances the view that Goethe returned to the topic of colour “from 1790” or “around 1790” (G: 206, 207), but similarly citing the May 1791 letter⁶⁷ prefers to place the prism aperçu itself in the year 1791: “His aperçu, as he called it, was the spontaneous rejection of Newton’s thesis, when looking through the prism in 1791 he realized that the colours only appeared as narrow edges at more or less strong light-dark boundaries, and not everywhere as he had expected.”⁶⁸

In an influential piece from over seventy years ago, the Goethe scholar and editor Rupprecht Matthaei had posited January or February 1790 as the most likely months of the prism aperçu, just prior to Goethe’s second trip to Venice.⁶⁹ However, the more recent work of Wenzel seems to have tipped

⁶⁶ “Unter Kennern der Farbforschung Goethes ist es umstritten, ob Goethe schon im Jahr 1790 oder erst im Folgejahr begonnen hat, die Optik Newtons anzugreifen. Mit starken Argumenten datiert Wenzel den Beginn dieses Unterfangens auf den 17.5.1791”. (U: 68)

⁶⁷ (G: 208).

⁶⁸ “Sein Aperçu wie er es nannte, war die spontane Abkehr von Newtons These, als er bei seinem Blick durchs Prisma 1791 gewahr wurde, dass die Farben sich nur an den mehr oder weniger starken Helldunkelgrenzen als schmale Ränder zeigten, und nicht überall, wie er es erwartet hatte.” (G: 211)

⁶⁹ “Dies kann nur Januar oder Februar 1790 gewesen sein, denn am 13. März machte sich Goethe auf nach Venedig.” Rupprecht Matthaei, “Über die Anfänge von Goethes Farbenlehre”, in: *Goethe. Neue Folge des Jahrbuchs der Goethe-Gesellschaft* 11 (1949): 250.

much expert opinion in favour of the year 1791.⁷⁰ At any rate, it appears difficult to arrive at a more precise date for this aperçu than either the years 1790 or 1791 because more specific written testimony on Goethe's part is apparently lacking.

Prima facie, Goethe's portrayal of his colour aperçu therefore seems unlike his account of his botanical aperçu. In the *Italian Journey* Goethe goes to great lengths to make sure the reader does not overlook exactly when and where his aperçu of the *Urpflanze* occurred. He even later returns to the event⁷¹ to underscore the exact time and place of this botanical insight: 17 April 1787, in the Public Garden in Palermo.⁷²

How to proceed? As stated at the outset, I will conclude this piece with a method for more accurately dating Goethe's prism aperçu. The method consists in applying the principle of polarity to this problem. However, we just saw that polarity is no longer considered a scientific principle as such; hence, this could immediately be dismissed as an out-of-date approach. Just to be clear: my aim is not at all to rehabilitate the principle of polarity, but simply to determine if its employment in Goethe's work extends to the issue at hand.

The location of Goethe's prism aperçu is not contested: it occurred in the Jägerhaus in Weimar. But the date does not seem to be given. The problem is obviously and above all a *problem of time*. The researcher could therefore ask: what is Goethe's conception of time in the *Farbenlehre*? If the aim of the work is to introduce the principle of polarity into chromatics, could polarity also play a role in Goethe's idea of time? If this proves to be the case, it might help towards solving the dating problem. Continuing this line of inquiry, we could furthermore pose the question: what is the antithesis or the polarity of time? Answer: *space*. In other words, an investigation of the idea of time in the *Farbenlehre* could include Goethe's idea of space, to see if the time and space of this aperçu reciprocally shed light on one another.

There are four steps to this demonstration. I'll provide an abridged version here. It can be further confirmed with many more references and other supporting material.

⁷⁰ See especially Manfred Wenzel, "... ich sprach wie durch einen Instinkt sogleich vor mich laut aus, dass die Newtonische Lehre falsche sei." – Dokumente und Deutungen zur Datierung von Goethes Prismenaperçu", in: A. Remmel & P. Remmel (eds.), *Liber amicorum. Katharina Mommsen zum 85. Geburtstag* (Bonn: Bernstein, 2010), 541-570. Although, as Wenzel himself notes, 1791 is actually a return to the earlier proposal of scholars like Salomon Kalischer (1906) or Reinhold Solch (1998). See M. Wenzel (ed.), *Goethe-Handbuch Supplemente. Vol. 2: Naturwissenschaften* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2012), 82.

⁷¹ See Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, July 1787 (HA 11: 374-375).

⁷² See Goethe, *Italienische Reise* (HA 11: 266-267).

a) Sources

As we have seen, polarity is closely intertwined with natural and aesthetic symmetry, totality, and harmony. All these ideas are deeply integral to Goethe's theory of colour, both in the various written texts and in the accompanying images. Earlier I partially cited Goethe's view of harmony from paragraph §61 of the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre*. I'll now quote paragraph §61 in full:

When the elements of an organic totality are still discernible within it, we may rightly designate it a harmony. The theory of colour harmony can likewise be derived from these phenomena, and through these qualities alone, the colours become capable of being applied for aesthetic purposes. This will be seen once we have passed through the entire circle of observations and returned back to the point from which we started.⁷³

I contend that in his oeuvre as a whole Goethe works in accordance with this organic idea of scientific and aesthetic harmony and continually circles back to his starting point. Colour harmony is just one instance of a much greater intellectual harmony. Goethe believed all empirical effects, from the most accidental to the highest flights of genius, are “interconnected and constantly merge into one another; they undulate, from the first to the last.”⁷⁴ He often lamented that his scientific and artistic “confession of faith” (*Glaubensbekenntnis*) was misunderstood, once declaring to Schiller in 1794: “there must be another method, in which nature is not treated in an isolated and separate manner, but where we strive to present it dynamically and livingly, from the whole to the parts.”⁷⁵ The problem of the dating of his prism aperçu, therefore, should be seen within this broader context; it requires a holistic approach, and supplementary material beyond the *Farbenlehre*. I think the solution to this problem can be obtained solely using works published by Goethe himself, so I'll draw the supplements from those publications.

⁷³ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §61 (1810: 26; HA 13: 345). See too §813 from the section “Totality and Harmony” in the Didactic Part: “Thus, although these harmonious opposites that are given to us in a narrow circle are actually very simple, it is an important hint that through totality, nature is inclined to elevate us toward freedom, and this is where we obtain a natural phenomenon that is immediately applicable for an aesthetic purpose.” (1810: 304; HA 13: 502-503).

⁷⁴ Here Goethe's uses the example of a falling *Ziegelstein* to illustrate this example. See Goethe, “Chromatik” in: *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt I* (1817), 320; and “Wartesteine”, *ibid.*, 380.

⁷⁵ Goethe, “Glückliches Ereignis” (published in 1817) (HA 10: 540).

Accordingly, the first step is to examine the published sources directly relating to the chronology of Goethe's colour experiences. If the autobiographical account of the prism aperçu in the "Confession of the Author" is going to be taken seriously, then the times or dates connected with it should be systematically considered as well. It goes without saying that diverging dates should not be overlooked; but inversely, any chronological convergences should be acknowledged.

Goethe's earliest scientific studies on colour were the *Beiträge zur Optik*. They were publicly announced in a statement dated "Weimar, 28 August 1791"⁷⁶ with part one of the *Beiträge* appearing at Michaelmas that same year.⁷⁷ – The 28 August is of course the date of Goethe's birthday. Hence, in the first announcement about his new colour research Goethe brings it into connection with his own birthday. We recall that no date is explicitly cited in the *Farbenlehre* when Goethe recounts his aperçu in the autobiographical "Confession"; yet he does date the opening dedication: 30 January 1808. – The 30 January is the date of the Duchess Luise's birthday, to whom the work is dedicated. Goethe circles back to this dedication at the end of the "Confession." Goethe had earlier dedicated other pieces to Luise on her birthday, including the masquerade "Planetentanz. Zum 30. Jannar 1784" (Dance of the Planets. On the 30 January 1784).⁷⁸ In terms of further biographical symmetries, Goethe had begun his journey to Italy from Carlsbad on 3 September 1786. – The 3 September is the date of the Duke Carl August's birthday, the husband of the Duchess Luise, and Goethe's patron in Weimar. Goethe remained in Italy until 1788 and the *Italian Journey* shows him becoming increasingly intrigued by the phenomena of colour in nature and in painting.⁷⁹ He returned from Italy, moved house in 1789, and subsequently had his prism aperçu. Carlsbad appears again at the conclusion of this twenty-year process of experimenting and writing about colour: "In May of the year 1810, when the printing of the *Farbenlehre* was ended, I immediately travelled to Carlsbad."⁸⁰ Goethe next began writing his autobiography.

⁷⁶ Goethe, "Ankündigung eines Werks über die Farben", in: *Intelligenz-Blatt des Journals des Luxus und der Moden*, Nr. 9, September 1791.

⁷⁷ See Goethe, *Beiträge zur Optik*, Erstes Stück, mit XXVII Tafeln (Weimar: im Verlag des Industrie-Comptoirs, 1791).

⁷⁸ Goethe, "Planetentanz. Zum 30. Jannar 1784", in: *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 13 (Stuttgart & Tübingen; Cotta, 1828), 206-213.

⁷⁹ Among others, see Goethe, *Italiensche Reise* (HA 11: 86-90, 139, 370-371, 439-441, 517). This text was first published in instalments in 1816-1817, 1829.

⁸⁰ Goethe, "Chromatik" in: *Zur Naturwissenschaft überhaupt I* (1822), 277.

It should now be pointed out that the exact *year* of the prism aperçu is not actually left unstated by Goethe. He supplies this year in an autobiographical work that bears the unusual title: *Tag- und Jahreshefte, als Ergänzung meiner sonstigen Bekenntnisse* (Daily and Yearly Notebooks, as a Supplement to My Other Confessions). The prism aperçu was a turning point in Goethe's biography, so it should not be surprising to find further information about it in his autobiographical texts. Writing under the rubric for the year 1790, Goethe alludes to his colour aperçu, and this account echoes the one in the scientific confession:

The *Metamorphosis of Plants* was written as a heartfelt relief. [...] Painterly colour schemes simultaneously caught my eye, and as I returned to the first physical elements of this theory, I discovered to my great astonishment that *the Newtonian hypothesis was false and untenable*. A more detailed investigation only confirmed my conviction.⁸¹

Hence, according to Goethe's own published testimony, his prism aperçu occurred in 1790. Here this insight is mentioned in relation to the 1790 *Metamorphosis of Plants*; it simultaneously happened while returning to the origins of colour schemes in painting; and it is communicated in an autobiographical work titled a *supplement* to his other *confessions*. This late account in the *Tag- und Jahreshefte* does indeed supplement the earlier one in the "Confession of the Author" by supplying the year of the prism aperçu's occurrence – 1790.

Nevertheless, in contrast to other discoveries like the intermaxillary bone, which Goethe excitedly transmitted to Herder in a confidential letter, it might be objected that traces of Goethe's colour discovery are not overtly present in his private correspondence until around May 1791, so the year 1790 should be ruled out as a chronological error on his part. Two possible replies to this objection: Firstly, Goethe clearly underscores that he did not always immediately reveal his ideas or discoveries privately or publicly, but sometimes kept them to himself, even for years.⁸² Secondly, in the text of the "Confession of the Author" itself, Goethe admits that initially he did not know what to make of his discovery; he was told by scientific colleagues it was neither original nor primary; yet he still felt it was important because "it

⁸¹ Goethe, *Tag- und Jahreshefte, als Ergänzung meiner sonstigen Bekenntnisse*, in: *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 31 (Stuttgart & Tübingen; Cotta, 1830), 13-14 (HA 10: 434-435).

⁸² For instance, see Goethe, "Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort" (1823) (HA 13: 37-41).

appeared to link onto some things that I had up to now experienced and believed.”⁸³ This last point is crucial.

But only the year is given in the *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, not the precise day. We therefore need a second step.

b) Simultaneous Time

In the Historical Part of the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe is adamant that researchers need to have a true *aperçu* to make scientific progress. But what exactly is an *aperçu*? It is a correct perception of the essential nature of a phenomenon, an exceedingly consequential insight. As the authors of *Seeing Colour* write: “It is the moment in which we see something new in something familiar, the moment in which a new aspect of something shows itself.” (SC: 13) Here Goethe cites a discovery by the Italian astronomer and physicist Galileo Galilei as the model of an *aperçu*:

genius shows that a single case can hold for a thousand, insofar as Galileo develops the laws of the pendulum and falling bodies from the swinging of church lamps. Everything in science depends on what can be called an *aperçu*, a perception into what actually underlies the phenomena. A perception of this kind is infinitely fruitful.⁸⁴

Scientific genius and *aperçus* are interrelated. Galilei's pendulum insight is fundamentally connected with the problem of time, and had incalculable consequences for the history and accuracy of time-keeping, a fact particularly crucial at sea, eventually resulting in the Dutch astronomer Huygens's development of a much more precise pendulum clock. Goethe's choice of this particular example reaffirms that it might be worth examining the dating of the prism *aperçu* in the light of his concept of time.

A conception of time can already be found in the important paragraphs §19-§61 of the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre*. We saw that these same paragraphs contain Goethe's original window experiment or *Urversuch*, where a person perceives the light and dark images of a cross when looking at the cross bars of a window. Goethe explains time in relation to the living human eye, saying it experiences light and darkness as a polarity and seeks the complement to these effects. Although it is a unified experience, the imprinting of these images on the retina of the eye is twofold – it occurs both *simultaneously* and *successively* in time (cf. especially §§33-34). In other words,

⁸³ Goethe, “Confession des Verfassers”, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 679; HA 14: 260).

⁸⁴ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 245-246; HA 14: 98). Goethe could have read about Galileo's insight in the book of his Weimar colleague, Christian Joseph Jagemann: *Geschichte des Lebens und der Schriften des Galileo Galilei* (Leipzig: G.E. Beer, 1787), 5-6.

if the simultaneous and successive are considered as chronological opposites or antitheses, then it could be argued that here is an idea of time based on the principle of polarity.

Philosophically, this relates in turn to Goethe's very idea of the idea itself. That is to say, we saw that the *Urphenomena* can be the *idea* of the plant or animal etc. Goethe's understands and defines the idea itself as encompassing both the *simultaneous* and *successive*:

The difficulty of joining idea and experience together appears as a hindrance in all research of nature: the idea is independent of time and space, the research of nature is confined to space and time; in the idea, the simultaneous and successive are therefore inwardly joined, while at the standpoint of experience, in contrast, they are always separate. ...⁸⁵

Consequently, when examining Goethe's ideas or the *Urphenomena*, we are philosophically already in the sphere of the simultaneous and successive.

However, what about considering Goethe's idea of successive and simultaneous time on a larger scale, say for the year 1790 itself? This would again be in line with the title of the autobiographical text, *Tag- und Jahreshefte*, insofar as the *year* of the aperçu could perhaps elucidate the *day*.

Starting with *simultaneous* time. Look at the works Goethe was simultaneously working on in the year 1790 to see whether they harmonize, or perhaps even furnish supplementary information about the date of his prism aperçu. Some of these works have already been mentioned, so I'll just briefly summarize the key points.

i). The 1790 *Venetian Epigrams*. As the title states, this text was written in Venice in 1790; it was first published in Schiller's *Musen-Almanach* in 1796.⁸⁶ This literary almanac also contained information on events in the gospels, the weather, and celestial occurrences, such as eclipses and the phases of the moon. The *Venetian Epigrams* contains three successive epigrams relating to Newtonian colour theory. Nos. 77 and 78 cite optics, Newton by name, and his school, while no. 79 also evokes the Easter event by critically bringing Newton's doctrine into connection with the crucifixion of a "living body" on a "wooden cross" (Habt ihr einmal das Kreuz von Holze tüchtig gezimmert, Passt ein lebendiger Leib freilich zur Strafe daran).⁸⁷ Newton's *experimentum crucis* will subsequently receive a scientific and

⁸⁵ Goethe, "Bedenken und Ergebung" (1820) (HA 13: 21).

⁸⁶ First anonymously, as "Epigramme. Venedig 1790", *Musen-Almanach* (1796): 205-260; and then in Goethe, *Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 1 (1828), 347-376. Only no. 77 is included in abridged HA edition, as epigram no. 31 (HA 1: 181).

⁸⁷ "Epigramme. Venedig 1790", *Musen-Almanach* (1796): 247-248.

aesthetic counterpart in Goethe's window cross experiment in the 1791 *Beiträge* and 1810 *Farbenlehre*, both of which are based on his original prism aperçu at the window in Weimar. Most importantly for the chronology, the *Venetian Epigrams* do not simply agree with the year 1790 for the dating for the prism aperçu, but considerably narrow the time frame for its occurrence. For Goethe was in Venice from March to May 1790, so his glance through the prism must have occurred in Weimar before his departure, i.e., in either January or February.

ii). The 1790 *Metamorphosis of Plants*.⁸⁸ This scientific treatise on botany was published at Easter 1790, and it is mentioned in the *Tag- und Jahreshefte* in conjunction with his colour aperçu. In fact, the *Metamorphosis of Plants* contains the same organic theory of successive and simultaneous time as the one in the *Farbenlehre*, but applied to the growth of a plant.⁸⁹ In other words, there is a direct correspondence between these two scientific treatises with regard to their idea of time. Moreover, with both the living eye and the living plant, we are in the higher domain of organic forces or the "vital force" (*Lebenskraft*)⁹⁰, as Goethe terms it, and no longer in the domain of the merely inorganic, like with the examples of magnetized iron and electrically charged tourmaline. And lastly, the *Urpflanze* transports the philosopher into the sphere of the *Urphenomena*.

iii). The 1790 *Faust: A Fragment*.⁹¹ This text was published both separately and in volume seven of Goethe's *Schriften* in early 1790. The inside cover of the *Schriften* edition contains a picture of Faust in his study. He sees a light with a cross on the window while an adjacent spirit figure holds a mirror reflecting Faust's image (cf. Fig. 4). This engraving was made by J.H. Lips under Goethe's direction and presents a symmetrical mirror or complementary image to Rembrandt's famous Faust picture. In Goethe's text, Faust, beholds a spirit after contemplating images in an astronomical book, including that of the macrocosm. Faust's meditation on the sign of the macrocosm results in a religious "confession" – the Manichean belief in the harmony of the ascending and descending celestial forces in golden buckets

⁸⁸ Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (Gotha: Ettingersche Buchhandlung, 1790).

⁸⁹ See Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (1790), §§112-123, 73-79 (HA 13: 98-101).

⁹⁰ Goethe, *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären*, §113, 73 (HA 13: 99).

⁹¹ Goethe, *Faust: ein Fragment*, in: *Goethe's Schriften*, vol. VII (Leipzig: bey Georg Joachim Göschen, 1790), 1-160. Also printed separately, *Faust: ein Fragment* (Leipzig: Göschen, 1790).

or vessels.⁹² This is a poetic pendant to Goethe's characterization of the Urphenomena as a cognitive ladder in §175 of the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre*. Goethe supplements Faust's study scene in the second 1808 edition, with Faust hearing the Easter bells, the commemoration of the resurrection of Christ after his crucifixion on the cross, and the Manichean doctrine of "two souls."⁹³ – Or in more philosophical language: Giordano Bruno's theory of two souls as the metaphysics of an essential polarity in the human being.⁹⁴

Just as the aperçu of light and colours on the window cross furnishes the empirical basis for Goethe's 1790 window experiment, this 1790 poetic text of Faust and its accompanying aesthetic engraving furnish an identical image of a researcher observing an enigmatic cross of light on a window. Lastly, the 1790 text + image confirm that the ideas of *mirror symmetry* and the *Urpolarität* of all beings were similarly at the forefront of Goethe's mind at the beginning of 1790.

In summary: when Goethe says of his prism aperçu that "it appeared to link onto some things that I had up to now experienced and believed"⁹⁵, then the above ideas, texts, and images, would be prime candidates for such a concatenation. In terms of simultaneous time, these three works all mutually support the dating of Goethe's colour insight to early 1790. This dating can be strengthened by additionally including the two musical pieces published with *Faust* in the same 1790 volume of the *Schriften: Jery und Bätely*⁹⁶ and *Scherz, List und Rache*⁹⁷, as well as Goethe's Venice reflections on painting restoration.⁹⁸ Thus, Rupprecht Matthaei seems to be right in situating the prism aperçu in either January or February 1790. But is it possible to be even more precise than these two months?

⁹² Goethe, *Faust: ein Fragment*, in: *Goethe's Schriften*, vol. VII (1790), 8 (HA 3: 22). For one of the earliest interpretations of this passage as a reference to the Manichean golden vessels, see *Goethe's Faust. Erster und zweiter Theil. Zum erstenmal vollständig erläutert von Heinrich Düntzer, Erster Theil*, (Leipzig: Dykische Buchhandlung, 1850), 173-174.

⁹³ Goethe, *Faust* (HA 3: 41, 47).

⁹⁴ On his idea of "two souls" and the duality or polarity of the whole of nature, see the reprinting of original Frankfurt Latin edition of 1591, accompanied by a German translation: Giordano Bruno, *Das Buch über die Monade, die Zahl, und die Figur* (Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 2010), 130-139 (especially 137).

⁹⁵ Goethe, "Confession des Verfassers", *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 679; HA 14: 260).

⁹⁶ Goethe, *Jery und Bätely. Ein Singspiel* in: *Goethe's Schriften*, vol. VII (Leipzig: bey Georg Joachim Göschen, 1790), 161-224.

⁹⁷ Goethe, *Scherz, List und Rache. Ein Singspiel* in: *Goethe's Schriften*, vol. VII (Leipzig: bey Georg Joachim Göschen, 1790), 225-320.

⁹⁸ Goethe, *Aeltere Gemahlde, Venedig 1790* in: *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 38 (Stuttgart & Tübingen; Cotta, 1830), 215-230.

c) Successive Time

We will now briefly look at the year 1790 with respect to *successive* time. That is to say, at other *prior* years leading up to the prism aperçu. And because the philosopher should examine the first or *Urphenomena*, I'll chose examples of years that Goethe himself connects with the earliest origins of the *Farbenlehre*, and see what they point to. The Historical Part of the *Farbenlehre* itself begins in the *Urzeit* and ends with Goethe's prism aperçu.⁹⁹ Hence, its composition relates to the Goethean twofold idea of *Urzeit* or archetypal time: both the earliest time and the idea of time.

Here we find a misconception about Goethe's theory of the aperçu. A genuine scientific aperçu is not a spontaneous intuition occurring out of the blue, arising from some vague inkling or fantastical genius, but it depends on the preceding serious work of the researcher. It is not the first, but the *middle link* in a much longer chain of experiences. An aperçu shares a philosophical affinity with the cognitive ladder of the *Urphenomena*. Moreover, what was a youthful experience of the earth and heavens united through a Homeric *aurea catena* in 1769, is now articulated in more philosophical language:

Every true aperçu arises from consequences and results in consequences. It is the middle link in a large, productive, and ascending chain.¹⁰⁰

But not to be misunderstood about successive time. One could first look at an event in the history of Goethe's color research, and then investigate the year it occurred. For instance, one of the earliest events mentioned in the *Farbenlehre* is Goethe's experience of coloured shadows on the Brocken, which we briefly referred to above. The time of this experience is not mentioned, but a further inquiry shows it took place in the year 1777.¹⁰¹ Or, we know Goethe had his aperçu in Weimar after moving house, but in what year did he first move to this town? An inquiry shows Goethe arrived in Weimar in the year 1775 after being invited there by Carl August and Luise. It is imperative to look at these events and they form key prior links in the chain of Goethe's prism aperçu. But here I am talking about the reverse procedure: first prioritizing the *time* over the event. That is, firstly, look at a Goethean reference to an early specific year in the history of his colour research that is before the year 1790; and only then secondly, inquire into the event connected with that year, to see if any sort of longer interlinked chain

⁹⁹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: xxiii, 679; HA 14: 11, 260).

¹⁰⁰ Goethe (HA 12: 414).

¹⁰¹ See Goethe's own commentary to *Harzreise im Winter* (HA 1: 392-400).

results. Again, some of these points have already been mentioned, so I'll just summarize key items.

i). The year 1749. Goethe makes the following remarks about the origins and beginnings of his scientific knowledge:

Thus, my research into nature rests on the pure basis of the experienced (*Erlebten*); who can take away from me that I was born in 1749, and (skipping over many things) that I diligently instructed myself using the first edition of Erxleben's *Naturlehre* ...¹⁰²

Even though Goethe's interest in the phenomena of magnetism and electricity already manifested itself in his boyhood, as he relates in his autobiography,¹⁰³ I can agree with Olaf Müller when he conjectures that Goethe's more scientific knowledge of the polarity of tourmaline and its curious relation to electricity could have come from Erxleben's work (U: 103-105). For Erxleben's *Naturlehre* contains information about the polarity of the forces in magnets, magnetism, electricity, and tourmaline. Yet I see no need to say that this scientific knowledge comes from the subsequent editions of Erxleben edited by Lichtenberg (U: 104). The first 1772 edition of Erxleben's *Naturlehre* already contains this information about the polar properties of magnets and tourmaline, close to each other in the text.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, here is an apparent homophone, symmetry, and contradiction. Homophone: Erleben & Erxleben. Symmetry: Goethe directs the reader to the *first* edition of Erxleben, while in the "Confession of the Author" he opines that his colour studies had not been included in the *last* edition of Erxleben, edited by Lichtenberg.¹⁰⁵ Contradiction: research based on nature, research based on books. Or are they just complementary?

Simultaneously in this same year of 1772 Goethe was reviewing for the *Frankfurter Gelehrter Anzeigen*, edited by his friend Johann Heinrich Merck, alias "Mephistopheles Merck."¹⁰⁶ Traces of Goethe's Erxleben reading can be detected in his review of Sulzer, a thinker also mentioned in the "Confession of the Author." This review and other texts from the time describe the creative and destructive forces in polar opposition in the

¹⁰² See Goethe, "Betrachtungen fortgesetzt zu Seite 315" in: *Zur Morphologie I,4* (1822): 361.

¹⁰³ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 1811 (HA 9: 117-118).

¹⁰⁴ Johann Christian Polykarp Erxleben, *Anfangsgründe der Naturlehre* (Göttingen und Gotha: J.C. Dieterich, 1772). Paragraph §534 on tourmaline, pages 430-432. Paragraph §537 on magnet, starting page 436.

¹⁰⁵ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 684; HA 14: 263).

¹⁰⁶ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 1814 (HA 10: 72).

universe.¹⁰⁷ Another early source of tourmaline for Goethe could be a 1782 scientific paper written by J.H. Merck himself. Merck's *Lettre à M. de Cruse, sur les os fossiles d'éléphants et de rhinocéros, qui se trouvent dans le pays de Hesse-Darmstadt*¹⁰⁸ underlines the unusual polar properties of a tourmaline specimen found near Frankfurt.¹⁰⁹ In terms of successive time, the year 1772 seems to be important link to Goethe's later 1790 colour aperçu. Yet the year *explicitly* given in the above passage on Erxleben is not 1772, or a year earlier in his boyhood, but one that points us much further back in Goethe's biography, back to 1749, the year of his birth.

ii). The year 1749. Goethe refers to the year 1749 in the Historical Part of the *Farbenlehre*. He points out that 1749 is when the French painter and engraver Jacques Gautier d'Agoty expounded a "correct aperçu" of his theories on colour. Although Gautier has the right insight, there remains opposition, he is up against the Newtonians and the French Academy of Sciences: "In November of the year 1749 he reads a comprehensive treatise (*memoire*) to the academy [...] at the same time as this capable man was putting the French academy under pressure, I lay in the cradle as a child of a few months."¹¹⁰ What was Gauthier's correct aperçu while Goethe was in the cradle? It was of the *Urphenomena* that "all colours can be reduced to three colours", i.e. of the *Urfarben*, of the three primary colours.¹¹¹ Thus, in the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe draws a direct parallel between the *Urphenomena*, a correct aperçu, and the year of his birth.

iii). The year 1749. After completing the *Farbenlehre* Goethe immediately began writing his autobiography *Aus meinem Leben – From My Life*. The year 1749 is found at the opening of the first instalment, *Poetry and Truth*: "On the 28 August 1749, at midday with the first stroke of the bells at twelve, I came into the world in Frankfurt am Main. The constellation was fortunate."¹¹² Goethe's autobiography begins with the exact day, month,

¹⁰⁷ See *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 33 (Stuttgart & Tübingen; Cotta, 1830), 24-33. Likewise the duality of forces in the 1772 essay "Von Deutscher Baukunst" in: *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 39 (Stuttgart & Tübingen; Cotta, 1830), 339-351.

¹⁰⁸ *Lettre à M. de Cruse, sur les os fossiles d'éléphants et de rhinocéros, qui se trouvent dans le pays de Hesse-Darmstadt* (Darmstadt: Imprimerie de la Cour & de la Chancellerie, 1782).

¹⁰⁹ "Je m'attendois surtout de jouir de votre étonnement, quand je vous aurois montré une Tourmaline qui a ses Poles attractifs & répulsifs & qui a été trouvé dans les environs de Francfort." (I cannot above all wait to see your astonishment when I show you a piece of tourmaline, whose has attractive and repulsive poles and that was found in the vicinity of Frankfurt.) *Lettre à M. de Cruse* (1782), 5.

¹¹⁰ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 549; HA 14: 201).

¹¹¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 549; HA 14: 201).

¹¹² Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1811), 3 (HA 9: 10).

year, and place of his birth. There follows a poetic and symbolic description of the heavens over Frankfurt at the time, but the underlying astronomical observations are still empirically correct. The last instalment of *Poetry and Truth* published by the poet himself ends with the adult Goethe and his mother contemplating his childhood cradle.¹¹³ Hence, the conclusion of *Poetry and Truth* evocatively orbits back to his birth at the start of *Poetry and Truth*. In a famous passage in the same text Goethe speaks of all his works as being “fragments of a great confession.”¹¹⁴ Fragments have to be collected together in order to make a whole. Goethe’s confession here seems to be identical with this religious spirit: “I am the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and end.”¹¹⁵ The 1795 *Märchen* similarly has the announcement “The time is at hand!” (Rev. 1:3, 22:10) as one of its foci. Evidently Goethe’s idea of simultaneous and successive time should be examined in this tale.¹¹⁶

These autobiographical passages in *Poetry and Truth* can be supplemented by the prose commentary to the poem *Urworte*, where Goethe puts forward his *philosophy* of the day of birth using ancient Greek terms. The birth is when the daimon, individuality, or genius of a person particularly reveals itself.¹¹⁷ The daimon is opposed to tyche, also known fortuna, fate, chance, or destiny. Goethe also gives tyche another name – *das Zufällige*, the accidental, while our daimon is “necessary” (*notwendig*). Here is an antithesis between the necessary and the accidental, necessity and chance; but like in the Neoplatonic tradition of Plotinus, the daimon “again and again invincibly returns” despite the opposition from tyche.¹¹⁸ In addition to the ancient Greek word *skieron* (shadow) used by Goethe to define colour, with these *Urworte* we are in the sphere of the *Ursprache* or archetypal language.¹¹⁹

What happened on the day of Goethe’s birth? This is when his eye first “perceived the light.”¹²⁰ In terms of *Urphenomena*, this is Goethe’s earliest direct experience of sunlight, or of the *Urlicht*, a name he gives to the sun in the *Farbenlehre*.¹²¹ According to Giordano Bruno, the five senses are the five

¹¹³ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1814), 537-538 (HA 10: 74).

¹¹⁴ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1812), 166 (HA 9: 283).

¹¹⁵ Rev. 22:13.

¹¹⁶ Goethe, *Märchen* (HA 6: 216, 218, 226).

¹¹⁷ See Goethe, *Urworte. Orphisch* (commentary) (HA 1: 403-405).

¹¹⁸ Goethe, *Urworte. Orphisch* (commentary) (HA 1: 403-405).

¹¹⁹ The *Ursprache* was of course a subject treated in depth by both Herder and J.G. Fichte.

¹²⁰ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811), 4 (HA 9: 10).

¹²¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §337 (1810: 128; HA 13: 404).

windows of the monad or individuality.¹²² In this tradition in the history of philosophy, the eye is a window. At Goethe's birth in Frankfurt, the window of his eye was looking at the light of the sun, just as in Weimar his eye was looking at the window. In the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe also speaks of the year of the birth of a person: "the year of birth contains in this sense actually the true prognostics of the nativity, more in the sense of the confluence of earthly things than the sequential effects of the heavenly constellations."¹²³ Thus, although Goethe's autobiography presents his birth empirically and symbolically, describing the situation of the planets, constellations, and the phase of the moon, his overall attitude about this in the *Farbenlehre* is not astrological, poetical, or mystical, but rationally sober and astronomical. That is, more like Ptolemy's *Almagest* than his *Tetrabiblos*.

To summarize: if an examination of simultaneous time supported the dating of the year 1790 for Goethe's prism aperçu, a study of the earliest successive time leads us back to the year 1749, and to the day of his birth. It is apparently the first link in our chain. We recall that the very first public announcement of his new colour theory is in a piece dated to his birthday. Goethe clearly seems to believe that light, aperçus, Urphenomena, genius, and birth, are all interconnected. Of course, the researcher does not need to agree or even disagree with him here, but rather should aim to present as accurately as possible Goethe's own ideas on these topics.

In short: according to simultaneous and successive time, Goethe ultimately seems to be pointing to a specific relation between his prism aperçu in Weimar and his birth in Frankfurt. When he speaks of harmony as circling back to the point from which one started, does he mean it literally, back to the point of birth? If that is true, the inquiry so far into Goethe's idea of time may have uncovered a few promising chronological leads, but it still has not yielded a more exact solution to the dating of his prism aperçu. In fact, it currently leaves us with two unreconciled opposites or unmediated polarities. A polarity of time: early 1790 and 28 August 1749; and a polarity of space: Weimar and Frankfurt.

We obviously need another step.

d) Astronomy

We recall that in paragraph §75-§78 of the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre* Goethe has painted a remarkable scene of the phenomenon of coloured shadows which he experienced during his decent from the Brocken. Instead

¹²² See Giordano Bruno, *Das Buch über die Monade, die Zahl, und die Figur*, 231.

¹²³ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 243; HA 14: 96).

of the shadows being dark or colourless, Goethe perceives them to be green. He compares this green with the green seen by underwater divers in diving bells.¹²⁴ These divers include the celebrated astronomer Edmund Halley, whose name is given to the comet that periodically returns to the skies above the earth roughly every 76 years. Via the light entering in through a small window in the diving bell, Halley once saw a red colour on his hand, like that of a damask rose, while the shadow in the water below was coloured green.¹²⁵ This unity of colour experience in diametrically opposed geographical regions of the earth leads Goethe to exclaim:

The same phenomenon that I perceived on a lofty mountain, is observed by others in the depths of the sea, and thus nature is everywhere in harmony with herself.¹²⁶

The result of an organic totality and harmony is that one returns back to the starting point. When Goethe published the *Beiträge zur Optik* in 1791, he included a drawing on the cover of the accompanying pack of cards (Fig. 5).



(Fig. 5: Goethe, Cover vignette of Optics Cards, 1791)

It contained an astronomical motif: an eye as the sun, or an eye in identity with the light of the sun. The formation and origin of the eye lies in the light of the sun, in an astronomical body. The cover picture also contains clouds and a rainbow, and some basic instruments of colour investigation, a prism and mirror. Comparing this eye to paintings and pictures, it appears that this eye is based on the eye of Goethe himself. The poet-scientist's principal organ of cognition is the window of his eye: "The eye was above all the organ with which I grasped the world."¹²⁷ Like an artist or painter he would have used a mirror to draw this cover picture.

¹²⁴ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 32-34; HA 13: 348-349).

¹²⁵ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I* (1810: 638-640). An explanation of this via the water as turbid medium is presented in §§663-666 of the Polemic Part.

¹²⁶ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, Didactic Part, §78 (1810: 34; HA 13: 349).

¹²⁷ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, 1811 (HA 9: 224).

Starting at paragraph §1 of the *Farbenlehre*, the physiology of the eye and its living polarity is the alpha and omega of the work. In paragraph §2 Goethe refers to the *couleurs accidentelles* (accidental colours) of Buffon. Like the necessary daimon and the accidental tyche, here is an opposition between the eye and the accidental colours that must be reconciled. Goethe first learnt about accidental colours as a twenty-year old in Frankfurt, in a text published in 1769 by the French scientist Nicolas de Béguelin: *Mémoire sur les ombres colorées* (Treatise on Coloured Shadows).¹²⁸ For Béguelin builds on Buffon's work, as well as referring to coloured shadows and the astronomer Edmund Halley's experience in the diving bell.¹²⁹ In the *Farbenlehre*, Goethe indirectly connects Béguelin's experiments with his own original window experiment.¹³⁰ The rings of Plato from the year 1769 are becoming further interlinked.

The *Farbenlehre* encyclopaedically draws upon and refers to the work of countless other scientists in many different fields. To do this with honesty and integrity, while not overlooking the contributions of others, gives rise to a form of *aesthetic* aperçu, as Goethe remarks when writing about the astronomer Johannes Kepler:

How much he reveres his master and teacher Tycho! [...] How happily he speaks about Copernicus! How assiduously he points out that the sole beautiful aperçu, where history can still be utterly gratifying, is that genuine human beings in all epochs announce one another in advance, refer to one another, prepare for one another.¹³¹

Astronomers and astronomy play a special role in the content and composition of the *Farbenlehre*. As we have seen, Goethe repeatedly appeals to astronomers like Galileo Galilei, Wilhelm Herschel, Edmund Halley, and Johannes Kepler, specifically as models for fruitful scientific aperçus, or in the case of the astronomer Tycho Brahe, as the model for a narrow and one-sided aperçu. Astronomy is inscribed in the textual symmetry of the entire *Farbenlehre* itself. The Introduction to the *Farbenlehre* begins by insisting on the correct empirical and conceptual center of our astronomical system, which is of course solar and not lunar. While the work ends with the important infrared insight of the astronomer Herschel, the discoverer of

¹²⁸ Nicolas de Béguelin, *Mémoire sur les ombres colorées*, in: Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Science et Belles-Lettres, Année MDCCLXVII (1767) (Berlin: chez Haude et Spener, 1769), 27-40.

¹²⁹ Nicolas de Béguelin, *Mémoire sur les ombres colorées*, 39.

¹³⁰ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II*, Historical Part (1810: 579-580).

¹³¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II*, Historical Part (1810: 248-249). (HA 14: 100).

Uranus. Here we have a circle in the astronomical sense – the revolutions of the heavenly bodies.

Although sharp criticisms of this science and its instrument-based methods can be found in Goethe's work¹³², his repeated recourse to astronomy here should not be surprising, because colour arises from the interplay of light and darkness, and his original prism aperçu arose from the light of the sun. Or did it? Perhaps this is a one-sided assumption and we are still only looking at the part and not the whole.

When faced with a difficult research problem, Goethe recommends finding a “pregnant point” to see if it might lead to a solution.¹³³ There exist other scientific disciplines as options, but let's return to the above two polarity problems and the dating of Goethe's prism aperçu, and conclude by contemplating them from the standpoint or lens of astronomy as it were. Indeed, the lens of the telescope is a supplementary instrument in the *Farbenlehre*, and one Newton himself was working with when he had, in Goethe's eyes, his “hypothetical”, “petrified” (*erstarrtes*), and “false aperçu.”¹³⁴ The hypothetical, incorrect, and one-sided, are crucial in intellectual history, insofar as opposition to them can lead to what is truer, more accurate, and whole. A distinction is made in §729 of the Didactic Part between astronomers who observe and astronomers who calculate.¹³⁵ Goethe favours observation, so perhaps an observational perspective in this field will help us find such a pregnant point. There is an enormous amount of further supporting material in his work, here I will have to confine myself to the barest minimum.

i). The polarity of space: How are the two different cities of Weimar and Frankfurt geographically or astronomically related in space? Of course, many correspondences exist, here is just one example related to astronomical polarity. Both Weimar and Frankfurt lie on the same *Polhöhe* or latitude: 50°. This is also the case for Carlsbad, from where Goethe departed on his journey for Italy on 3 September, 1786. In fact, Goethe was supposed to depart Carlsbad for Italy on 28 August, his birthday. He explicitly refers to this fact and the latitude or *Polhöhe* of Frankfurt in the first opening paragraph of the *Italian Journey*. *Polhöhe* in German gets its name from the poles of the earth, and seen from this empirical but global perspective, Weimar and Frankfurt

¹³² For instance, in Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829) (HA 8: 120-121). On Goethe's relation to astronomy, see among others, Aeka Ishihara, “Goethe und die Astronomie seiner Zeit. Eine astronomisch-literarische Landschaft um Goethe”, in: *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 117 (2000): 103-117.

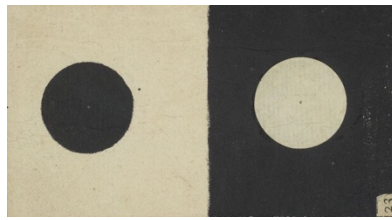
¹³³ Goethe, “Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort” (HA 13: 40).

¹³⁴ Goethe, *Farbenlehre II*, Historical Part (1810: 402, 417, 419, 479).

¹³⁵ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, Didactic Part, §729 (1810: 271-272; HA 13: 485).

share this spatial relationship in common. These two poles in Goethe's life and work form a unified pair through their latitude.

ii). The polarity of time: How can the times of early January 1790 and 28 August 1749 be astronomically reconciled? We recall that the very tripartite classification of the *Farbenlehre* occurred to Goethe during the period of observing the surface and phases of the moon through the lens of a Herschel telescope. Astronomically, therefore, we could consider time from the standpoint of the lunar month and examine the lunar phases. Here too we find a polarity: between the new moon and full moon. From the vantage point of the earth, the new moon is when the sun and moon are in *conjunction* and no sunlight is reflected by the moon; the full moon is when they are in *opposition*, and the lunar surface is fully illuminated by the sun. Goethe explains these phases of the lunar month in §17 of the Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre*, observing how the moon in conjunction (small, dark, new) appears one fifth smaller than when in opposition (large, bright, full).¹³⁶



(Fig. 6: Goethe, Optics card number 23, 1791)

This polarity between the new moon and full moon can be visualized by looking at card number 23 from the *Beiträge zur Optik* (Fig. 6). To have an experience more identical to Goethe's 1790 original prism aperçu by taking into account the phase of the moon is not some directive by the late Goethe, but can already be found in the text of the 1791 *Beiträge* when he recommends supplementing the window cross experiments on card 19 with further experiments on card 23. Seen through a prism, the circular forms on card 23 become "half-moon-like" (*halbmondförmig*).¹³⁷ *Halbmond* is the German term for the first quarter of the moon's phase. Moreover, among the entire group of prism cards, number 23 appears isolated and not to have another image as a literal counterpart, just like card 19 initially does (Fig. 3). I suggest card 23 be paired with the cover image of the eye as the sun (Fig. 5), insofar as sun and moon form a complementary image and pair. Consequently, looking through a prism at the colours generated on card 19

¹³⁶ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §17 (1810: 6). (HA 13: 332).

¹³⁷ See *Beiträge zur Optik* 1, §65 (1791), 39.

+ card 23 can lead to a fuller experience of Goethe's original aperçu. Returning now to some of the key episodes above from this astronomical perspective of lunar time and the phases of the moon.

Goethe's genius was born on 28 August 1749 – it was a full moon. The birth was difficult, the infant almost died and had to be revived. As Goethe relates, both the sun and full moon were in the sky, and this maximal phase of the moon had to pass before he could be born.¹³⁸ Here is literally a pregnant point. It was the overcoming of an opposition, daimon struggling with tyche. Daimon and tyche have complementary astronomical identities – they represent the sun and moon.¹³⁹ The precise date of Goethe's original entry into Weimar, where his fate became inextricably linked with Carl August and Luise, is the 7 November 1775.¹⁴⁰ The light of the moon on this propitious day was at its greatest – it too was a full moon. We just cited Goethe's influential early experience of coloured shadows on the Brocken. The *Farbenlehre* recommends a specific lunar phase for best viewing this phenomenon – under the light of a full moon.¹⁴¹

The very first text in the *Farbenlehre* is not the Introduction or Foreword, but the dedication to Luise. Goethe circles back again to this dedication at the very end of the “Confession of the Author”, writing: “And so here at the conclusion, like already at the beginning, the work that was luckily completed under her influence is gratefully dedicated to that princess who cannot be revered enough.”¹⁴² The date of Luise's birthday is the 30 January and it is directly stated in the dedication. We recall that Goethe dedicated the *Dance of the Planets* to Luise on an earlier birthday, a text that refers to Herschel's recent discovery of the new planet Uranus.¹⁴³ Is Luise, therefore, another Makarie-like figure in Goethe's work, whose significance

¹³⁸ Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1811), 3 (HA 9: 10).

¹³⁹ There is a general consensus in the research that Goethe's poem *Urworte* on daimon and tyche was partly inspired by his reading of Georg Zoega. This astronomical interpretation can be found in Georg Zoega, *Abhandlungen* (Göttingen: in der Dieterischen Buchhandlung, 1817). 39-40.

¹⁴⁰ See the text printed on the 50th Jubilee anniversary of his entrance into Weimar: *Zu Goethe's Jubelfeste in Weimar den siebenten November 1825*.

¹⁴¹ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, Didactic Part, §76 (1810: 33; HA 13: 348-349). For an overview of this experiment of this kind, cf. *Seeing Colour*, 28-29.

¹⁴² Goethe, *Farbenlehre II* (1810: 692; HA 14: 269). The Didactic Part of the *Farbenlehre* was already finished in 1808, and the dedication is dated: “Weimar, 30 January 1808.”

¹⁴³ There the planet Uranus is referred to under the early suggested name of Cybele. See Goethe, “Planetentanz. Zum 30. Jannar 1784”, in: *Goethes Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vol. 13 (1828), 212.

only dawns on us, when, like Wilhelm Meister, we look out the window and observe the astronomical phenomena?¹⁴⁴

That may be, but a historical date is not just a literary motif but an empirical and scientific fact. In this purely factual sense, the date of 30 January is not hidden, but openly present before our eyes in the opening pages of the *Farbenlehre*. If Goethe is consistent and rigorous in his striving for empirical totality and aesthetic harmony on the one hand, and in his adherence to the principle of “open mysteries” on the other, then the 30 January 1790 should be the solution to the problem of his prism aperçu, and the phase of the moon on this date should similarly be full. Consulting an almanac, calendar, or astronomical epherimedes, indeed confirms that there was a full moon on 30 January 1790. The above polarities of space and time, between Goethe's birth in Frankfurt and the prism aperçu in Weimar, can be astronomically reconciled by means of latitude and the phase of the full moon in the lunar month. Astronomy is an *aurea catena* in Goethe's work.

But it could immediately be objected that there was also a full moon on 1 January 1790, as well as another on the 1 March 1790, and that one of these two dates might be the correct one for the prism aperçu. That is to say, January 1790 was unusual in that there were two full moons in the same month, with February having none, and Goethe had not yet left for Venice on 1 March. Nevertheless, considering Goethe's repeated emphasis on the relationship between aperçus, Urphenomena, complementarity, and scientific genius, there is a greater and more open unity with the contents and composition of the *Farbenlehre* and the January date in the dedication.¹⁴⁵

To conclude: Goethe's idea of time in the *Farbenlehre* provides a method for finding the exact date of his prism aperçu. For when Goethe's eye first saw the light on the day of his birth in Frankfurt, and successively, when he fortuitously put a prism to his eye in Weimar and saw colour vividly manifested on the cross bars of the window, the source of this light was simultaneously from both the sun and the full moon, the moon as the complement and mirrored light of the sun. Systematically and philoso-

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1829) (HA 8: 121-122). In this regard, see Aeka Ishihara, *Makarie und das Weltall: Astronomie in Goethes 'Wanderjahren'* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1998), and Reto Rössler, “Goethes Sternwartenszene der ‘Wanderjahre’ und die Transformation(en) deskosmologischen ‘Weltgebäudes’ der Aufklärung”, *Goethe-Jahrbuch* 137 (2020): 51-62.

¹⁴⁵ That a solution is to also look at the astronomical calendar or the epherimedes to confirm the date of 30 January 1790, also forms a curious but harmonious connection with Rupprecht Matthaei's discovery in the Goethe archives that the Ur or very first note of Goethe on colour in Weimar seems to have occurred on the back of an old disused 1789 house calendar. See Rupprecht Matthaei, “Über die Anfänge von Goethes Farbenlehre”, in: *Goethe. Neue Folge des Jahrbuchs der Goethe-Gesellschaft* 11 (1949): 251.

phically applying the principle of polarity to this problem reveals that his prism aperçu occurred on 30 January 1790. Indeed, precisely this date yields an astonishing harmony between the *Farbenlehre* and the rest of Goethe's scientific, poetic, religious, and autobiographical writings:

This will be seen once we have passed through the entire circle of observations and returned back to the point from which we started.¹⁴⁶



(Fig 7: Goethean colour circle)

¹⁴⁶ Goethe, *Farbenlehre I*, §61 (1810: 26; HA 13: 345).

Symphilosophie

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

« Symphilosoper »

Novalis et Friedrich Schlegel 250 ans plus tard

*Laure Cahen-Maurel**

Nicholas Saul, Johannes Endres (éd.), *Ich liebe Deine Liebe. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis). Eine Ausstellung zum 250. Geburtstag der beiden Dichter*, Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Francfort, Göttinger Verlag der Kunst, 2022, 192 p. ISBN 978-3-945869-13-0

Walter Zimmermann (éd.), *Novalis ABC Buch. Das „Allgemeine Brouillon“. Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik*, neu geordnet nach Novalis eigenen Klassifizierungen mit Zeichnungen von Nanne Meyer, Berlin, Matthes & Seitz Berlin, 2022, 312 p. ISBN 978-3-7518-0366-3

Le néologisme *symphilosophie* a fait fortune. Il est désormais passé dans le langage ordinaire de la culture philosophique et littéraire. Il y a vingt ans, sous la conduite de Denis Thouard, le volume collectif *Symphilosophie : F. Schlegel à Iéna* contribuait au succès de la notion dans le domaine de la critique en mettant le coup de projecteur le plus vif (dans le monde francophone) sur cette pratique qui a émané de l'amitié nouée entre Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis¹. Il existe d'autres exemples d'amitié profonde entre deux philosophes, comme l'amitié de Montaigne pour La Boétie, auteur du *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (1548). On connaît la formule restée célèbre de Montaigne pour en parler : « parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi »². Mais l'affinité élective de Novalis et de Schlegel est unique dans les activités qu'elle a produites. Denis Thouard l'a montré en prenant pour point de

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¹ Denis Thouard (dir.), *Symphilosophie : F. Schlegel à Iéna*, Paris, Vrin, 2002, avec des textes de Ernst Behler, Christian Berner, Donatella di Cesare et Denis Thouard.

² Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, Livre I, Ch. 28, « De l'amitié ».

référence le projet partagé d'une encyclopédie ayant à surmonter la fragmentation et l'hétérogénéité des savoirs, à permettre la différence et la permutation des points de vue, pour satisfaire aux exigences « symphilosophiques » de synthèse et d'œuvre commune.

Deux productions de circonstance, parues en 2022 pour le deux cent-cinquantième de la naissance de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis, sont l'occasion de reconsidérer ces thèmes centraux du romantisme, « symphilosophie » et encyclopédisme. Et de dresser un bref bilan éditorial des œuvres de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis deux cent cinquante ans plus tard. Le travail d'édition et de traduction des sources est un travail précieux pour tous les chercheurs qui se donnent la peine de revenir aux textes. Il importe d'en rendre compte.

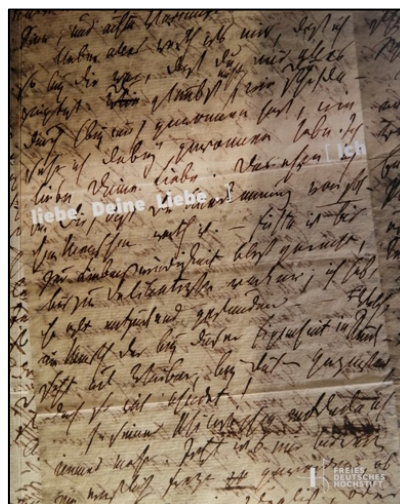
1. « Symphilosophie avec Hardenberg. En forme de lettres. »

Même si le terme apparaît davantage sous la plume de Friedrich Schlegel, il est difficile d'établir avec certitude qui, de Schlegel ou de Novalis, est le créateur à proprement parler du néologisme *symphilosophie*. La correspondance qu'ont échangée les deux amis permet néanmoins de faire état de l'évolution intellectuelle tant de la notion que de sa pratique entre Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis.

C'est notamment ce que l'exposition « 'Ich liebe Deine Liebe.' – Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) », présentée au tout nouveau Deutsches Romantik-Museum à Francfort du 26 avril au 8 septembre 2022, a eu pour but de mettre en lumière. L'événement, désormais clos, mérite d'être salué en raison de l'importance d'abord quantitative, puis qualitative, de la présentation d'un corpus – sept années de correspondance entre les deux amis, de 1793 à 1800 – essentiel pour appréhender une catégorie intellectuelle, le romantisme, en construction incessante. Au plan quantitatif, l'exposition a offert la présentation la plus étendue jamais montrée jusqu'ici des autographes de la correspondance conservée au Freies Deutsches Hochstift. Cinquante-quatre lettres, auxquelles s'ajoutent deux lettres recopiées. Soit, au total, 56 des 62 lettres qui nous sont restées sur probablement une centaine échangée entre leur rencontre à l'université de Leipzig, en 1792, et la mort de Novalis en 1801. Vingt-cinq de ces 62 lettres sont de Novalis, les trente-sept autres de Schlegel. Le nombre de lettres conservées de part et d'autre est donc suffisamment en équilibre pour pouvoir faire de cette correspondance croisée un objet d'étude à part entière. D'un point de vue maintenant qualitatif, la correspondance de Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis

excède la simple pratique sociale et la dimension purement biographique : elle appartient incontestablement à la philosophie romantique. Non seulement le genre de la lettre relève des nouveaux régimes d'écriture philosophique revendiqués par eux, mais l'écriture épistolaire est le principal conducteur de leur « symphilosophie ».

Publié aux éditions Göttinger Verlag der Kunst, le beau catalogue de l'exposition atteint le but de redonner ses lettres de noblesse à la correspondance, qui est souvent le parent pauvre des études philosophiques sur le romantisme. Et de faire entendre la partition de cette « symphilosophie » entre les deux principales têtes pensantes du premier romantisme. L'ouvrage est co-écrit par les commissaires de l'exposition, deux spécialistes réputés du romantisme allemand : Nicholas Saul, Professeur de littérature et d'histoire des idées allemandes à l'Université de Durham et actuel Président de l'*Inter-nationale Novalis-Gesellschaft*, et Johannes Endres, Professeur de littérature et d'histoire de l'art à l'Université de Californie à Riverside, à qui l'on doit notamment un manuel de la vie et de l'œuvre de Friedrich Schlegel aux éditions Metzler. Les 192 pages du catalogue sont ordonnées le long d'un fil chronologique, découpé en six tranches de vie, appelées « épisodes »³, que scandent les lettres commentées par thème. Ce qui donne à l'ouvrage son originalité est le fait qu'au sein d'une telle présentation linéaire de la correspondance, des années d'étude et passions de jeunesse à l'épreuve de la maladie pour Novalis en passant par la participation à la vie sociale, entre établissement dans une profession et développement d'une vocation littéraire et philosophique, les séquences restent ouvertes à un parcours thématique : le métier d'écrivain, la critique, la philosophie, les sciences, le républicanisme, la Grèce antique, les femmes... Chaque page se présente selon la même maquette : un thème qui se détache des lettres est isolé ; et les textes de Nicholas Saul et de Johannes Endres qui le commentent sont entourés par une riche iconographie en couleur, qui donne à voir l'écriture manuscrite des épistoliers ; les portraits connus (Caroline Böhmer, Dorothea Veit, Sophie von Kühn, Julie von Charpentier) ; divers tableaux, dessins ou gravures (comme le *Saint Jean*



³ L'exposition a été organisée en six temps successifs, montrant à chaque fois au public un « épisode » différent dans l'évolution de ce matériau épistolaire.

l'Évangéliste à Patmos de Martin Schongauer) ; ainsi que des documents d'époque (des frontispices et des pages d'éditions originales). L'essentiel du catalogue (144 pages) est consacré au commentaire des lettres. Mais le volume contient aussi en annexe la transcription d'un choix de 30 d'entre elles.

L'ouvrage ne constitue pas un commentaire philosophique de la correspondance (ce n'est pas son but), mais un de ses mérites est d'en souligner le côté laboratoire de pensée, qui ouvre la voie de la création lexicale et conceptuelle. On découvre dans la correspondance beaucoup d'autres exemples de néologismes inventés par Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis, qui n'ont pas été promis à la même fortune que la « symphilosophie ». Comme, par exemple, le néologisme *épichronisme*, dont Novalis est le créateur : à savoir quelque chose comme une extension ou un remplissage du présent, par opposition à l'« anachronisme » régressif, qui place un fait avant sa date (p. 47). Comment ne pas penser, ici, au prolongement puissant que les Thèses de Walter Benjamin *Sur le concept d'histoire* donneront, à travers la notion d'« actualité », à cette idée romantique d'une densité effective, vécue, du présent historique, associée à la notion d'élasticité, par opposition à la conception quantitative et mécanique d'un temps physique vide et homogène ?

Revenons à la « symphilosophie », terme qui inaugure, dans les lettres, une série de manipulations lexicales formées sur le même préfixe *sym-* : « sympoésie », « sympraxis », « symphysique », « symorganisation », « symévolution », etc. La correspondance présente non seulement le plus grand nombre d'occurrences, mais les premiers emplois attestés du néologisme, dans des lettres de septembre 1797 et mai 1798, après un temps de latence de deux ans (entre 1794 et 1796), où les échanges entre Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis se sont interrompus.

Le néologisme *symphilosophie* procède du *fichtisiren*, autre manipulation lexicale désignant les quelques journées passées par les deux amis à Iéna durant l'hiver 1796, à discuter, seuls, de la philosophie de Fichte. Puis, de cette lecture en commun de la première version publiée de la *Doctrine de la science*, Friedrich Schlegel souhaite élargir la « symphilosophie » au domaine de l'écriture, dans le cadre de sa nouvelle revue, l'*Athenaeum*. Sous sa plume, le 26 septembre 1797, le néologisme se teinte d'une coloration philologique. Ainsi écrit-il à Novalis :

J'attends tes communications philosophiques avec impatience. Même si la *symphilosophie* est le véritable nom de notre association, ne sois toutefois pas avare et ne la limite pas craintivement aux limites de celle-

ci. – Ce serait merveilleux si je pouvais également te rendre des services de *diaskeuastēs* en philosophie. (p. 166 ; lettre commentée p. 84)

Autrement dit, ici, Friedrich Schlegel offre à Novalis ses services comme scribe, copiste, réviseur, compilateur. Mais c'est bien la correspondance qui deviendra le lieu propre de la « symphilosophie », comme l'atteste, dans le catalogue, le quatrième « épisode » de l'exposition (« Symphilosophie et échange épistolaire »). À Novalis, Schlegel écrit le 28 mai 1798 :

La forme épistolaire ne devrait-elle pas te convenir pour des essais philosophiques (ou quelque autre genre) ? Si la proposition d'une symphilosophie épistolaire te plaît, je t'en proposerai un plan, bien entendu pour organiser la liberté, pas pour la restreindre. (p. 171)

Durant l'été qui suit, il note encore dans ses carnets : « Symphilosophie avec Hardenberg. En forme de lettres. C'est un magicien ; moi, un simple prophète »⁴. Leur « symphilosophie épistolaire » s'intensifie dans le contexte des premières réflexions sur les projets d'encyclopédie et de nouvelle « Bible », à partir de 1798 (épisode 5).

À la lecture de la correspondance, il est frappant de constater le renversement du rapport de disciple à maître qu'elle met en scène. Au début de leurs échanges, Novalis se présente comme un élève dont l'esprit est encore en formation et qui aurait perdu son innocence philosophique sous l'influence de Friedrich Schlegel. Ainsi lui écrit-il dans la première moitié du mois d'août 1793 : « Tu as été pour moi le grand prêtre d'Éleusis. Par toi, j'ai appris à connaître le ciel et les Enfers ; par toi, j'ai goûté aux fruits de l'arbre de la connaissance » (p. 149). On le sait, Friedrich Schlegel, philologue de formation, entamera dès 1794 une carrière d'historien de la littérature et de critique littéraire, avec la publication de ses premiers écrits sur la poésie grecque. C'est ce sens historique que Novalis estime avoir éduqué auprès de Schlegel. Il lui écrit le 8 juillet 1796, après que celui-ci a renoué le contact le premier : « Tu sais combien tu as contribué autrefois à mon éducation. Même la gratitude la plus ordinaire n'oublie pas le maître. Chaque pensée où je faisais l'épreuve de ma culture historique était liée à ton souvenir » (lettre transcrite p. 154).

Un exemple concret du sens historique de Schlegel est sa recension de l'opuscule kantien *Pour la paix perpétuelle*, parue en août 1796 dans la revue *Deutschland* sous le titre *Essai sur le concept de républicanisme*. Schlegel y pousse

⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, été 1798. Cité dans *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (= HKA), éd. P. Kluckhohn, R. Samuel, H.-J. Mähl, G. Schulz *et al.*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1960-..., vol. 4, p. 621.

la thèse de Kant plus loin en défendant une forme véritablement démocratique de la République, sur le modèle de la Grèce antique, et une vision de la paix reposant sur la fraternité. La conception historiquement informée de Friedrich Schlegel anticipe sur la vision novalissienne, sinon utopique, du moins tournée vers l'avenir, d'une révolution universelle – l'âge d'or futur – englobant la politique, la morale, l'art et les sciences.

Au-delà de l'histoire et de la politique, les lettres attestent encore que Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis ont été mutuellement des guides pour se diriger dans des lectures philosophiques ardues, Fichte, Kant, Schelling, mais aussi Hemsterhuis, Platon, ou encore Spinoza. L'image du fil qu'Ariane donna à Thésée pour le guider dans le labyrinthe de Dédale se profile derrière ces mots de Novalis à Friedrich Schlegel de juin 1797 :

Fichte est le plus dangereux de tous les penseurs que je connaisse. Il ensorcelle chacun à l'intérieur de son cercle. [...] tu as été élu pour protéger de la magie de Fichte ceux qui font l'effort de penser par eux-mêmes. J'ai personnellement éprouvé à quel point il est amer à comprendre. C'est à toi seul, et à l'idée que j'entrevois de ton esprit libre et critique, que je dois maintes alertes, maints signes qui m'aident à m'orienter dans cet effroyable labyrinthe d'abstractions⁵. (p. 164-165)

Ici encore, Novalis se place sous l'égide de Friedrich Schlegel, en disant devoir à l'indépendance d'esprit de ce dernier de s'être senti plus libre dans sa lecture de la *Wissenschaftslehre* fichtéenne. Pourtant, c'est précisément la période de leur symphilosophie où ils « fichticisent » ensemble qui démontre que Novalis est « clairement des deux », pour reprendre les mots de Nicholas Saul et Johannes Endres, « la tête véritablement philosophique – surtout après ses *Études fichtéennes* » (p. 7). Les deux spécialistes rejoignent ici la position de Manfred Frank, pour qui les notes prises par Novalis lors de sa lecture de fond de la *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794 / 1795) constituent le texte le plus philosophique de tout le corpus romantique. Aussi, alors qu'il était placé par Novalis dans la position du maître aux débuts de leurs échanges, Friedrich Schlegel se campe lui-même, à partir de 1797, comme l'élève. Le 5 mai, il écrit à Novalis : « Comme ce serait bien si nous pouvions nous asseoir tous les deux seuls pendant quelques jours et philosopher, ou, comme nous avons coutume de dire, *fichticiser* » (lettre transcrite p. 163). Et

⁵ Trad. fr. O. Schefer, in Novalis, *Semences*, Paris, Allia, 2004, p. 21 (trad. mod.).

le 21 juin : « Je suis certain que je pourrais apprendre de toi, de ton toi écrit, autant que j'ai appris de Fichte »⁶.

Mais ce que la correspondance montre, enfin, c'est à quel point le *penser duel* de la « symphilosophie » se nourrit autant des tensions et des divergences de vues que des convergences entre les deux épistoliers. Ces « ambivalences de la symphilosophie » sont soulignées par Nicholas Saul et Johannes Endres (p. 86). Dès août 1793, les deux amis se voyaient avançant sur une même ligne, mais en sens contraires : Friedrich Schlegel en direction du levant, Novalis tourné vers l'Occident (p. 39). Cinq ans plus tard, c'est véritablement sur deux voies différentes qu'ils se sont engagés. Friedrich Schlegel parle du « dualisme de [leur] symphilosophie »⁷, dans une lettre capitale du 2 décembre 1798 énonçant en particulier les différences majeures entre ses propres conceptions et celles de Novalis sur l'encyclopédisme et la nouvelle « Bible » : tandis que celle-ci est porteuse chez Schlegel d'une visée proprement religieuse, la nouvelle Bible de Novalis sera à la fois scientifique, philosophique et littéraire.

2. Apprendre à lire l'univers. L'abécédaire de Novalis

Contrairement à la correspondance, qui peut commodément être présentée de façon strictement chronologique, le millier et quelque de notes préparatoires écrites par Novalis en 1798-1799 en vue de cette « Bible scientifique » qui nous est parvenue sous le titre *Brouillon général* soulève des problèmes d'organisation interne. Novalis n'avait pas entièrement fixé lui-même la composition de ces feuillets qui ont été dispersés à sa mort ; apparemment, Schlegel n'a pas ici joué le rôle symphilosophique du *diaskeuastēs* qui se serait chargé de relire tous les brouillons, d'en extraire et réunir les notes jugées propres à une publication, d'en supprimer celles ayant moins de valeur. Le contenu du texte est fait, en l'état, d'un ensemble de notes hétérogènes, plus ou moins développées. On passe sans progression apparente des sciences de la nature aux sciences de l'esprit, des principes de la matière aux principes de l'intelligence humaine, des réalités terrestres aux réalités spirituelles, ou l'inverse. Pourtant, une répartition sémantiquement pertinente pour ce corpus de prime abord déroutant avait été prévue par Novalis lui-même, le poète-philosophe ayant commencé à mettre de l'ordre,

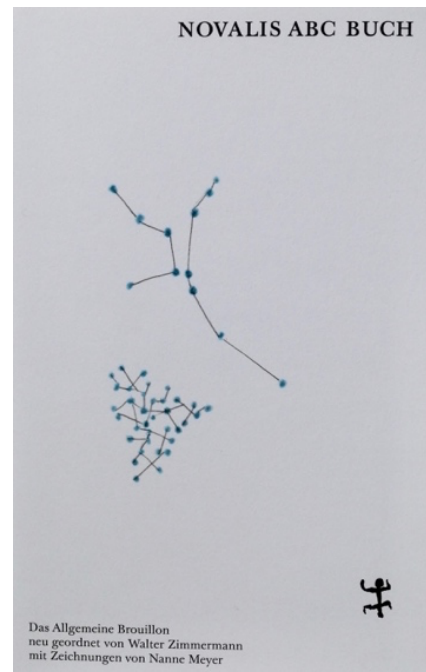
⁶ Cité par Nicholas Saul et Johannes Endres dans l'Introduction au catalogue, p. 7. Cf. *Friedrich Schlegel – Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke* (= KFSA), éd. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett et Hans Heichner, Paderborn, Schöningh, 1958–..., vol. II, p. 374.

⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, lettre à Friedrich von Hardenberg du 2 décembre 1798, KFSA XXIV, p. 206.

vers la fin du mois d'octobre 1798, dans les brouillons qu'il avait noircis en définissant des rubriques, telles que la chimie, la médecine, l'astronomie, la cosmologie, la « théorie de l'avenir », la « théorie de l'éducation », ou encore l'« encyclopédistique ». Mais le classement des brouillons est incomplet. Novalis n'a pas non plus rangé les entrées par ordre alphabétique, ni ne les a numérotées ; la numérotation a été ajoutée par les éditeurs ultérieurement. Des 1151 notes, on en dénombre 643 répertoriées sous ces catégories, soit l'intégralité (ou presque) de deux des quatre liasses de textes que compte *Le Brouillon général*. Novalis s'est arrêté en chemin dans son travail de classement des entrées et on ne saura probablement jamais ce qu'il avait envisagé comme ultime étape. Aujourd'hui encore, *Le Brouillon général* demeure en attente d'une interprétation globale, sur le plan tant de la méthode que du contenu. Et l'éditeur, conscient que le mot d'*encyclopédie* ne remplit pas totalement ici son programme, n'aurait pas d'autre solution que de ranger ces matériaux dans l'ordre chronologique de leur rédaction. C'est le parti adopté par Hans-Joachim Mähl dans l'édition historique et critique des œuvres de Novalis.

Cinquante-sept ans après la première édition critique préparée par Mähl pour le troisième volume des *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (HKA), le compositeur allemand contemporain Walter Zimmermann a cependant voulu tenter de reprendre le fil du projet d'encyclopédie là où Novalis l'avait inter-rompu, en essayant quelque chose de nouveau. Il donne chez Matthes & Seitz Berlin une réédition partielle du *Brouillon général*, sous le titre *Novalis ABC Buch*. Fruit d'une collaboration avec le germaniste Josef Schreier, qui signe l'introduction au volume, et l'artiste plasticienne Nanne Meyer, le livre est une œuvre « totale », encyclopédie en mots mais aussi – on y reviendra – en images et en sons, car, dans l'esprit de Walter Zimmermann, cette nouvelle présentation des considérations scientifiques du *Brouillon général* peut servir de matrice à une transcription des notations textuelles en structures musicales.

W. Zimmermann, dont la renommée est établie, appartient à cette lignée de compositeurs qui nourrissent un rapport intime avec la philosophie, fondé sur une réinterrogation personnelle de l'œuvre de certains auteurs de



prédilection. Dans ce domaine, il se situe dans la continuité de John Cage ; et ce travail d'édition n'est pas son premier coup d'essai. On lui doit, également en 2022, la publication chez Suhrkamp d'un recueil de réflexions tirées des papiers posthumes de Wittgenstein sur l'expérience musicale et les limites du langage, notamment du discours philosophique, à la décrire⁸. Outre Novalis et Wittgenstein, Nietzsche compte encore parmi les penseurs dont Walter Zimmermann a revisité l'œuvre sous l'angle de la musique en éditant un volume d'aphorismes intitulé *Afrikanische Heiterkeit – Nietzsche zur Musik* (Beginner Press).

Mais avec Novalis, il y a plus chez W. Zimmermann. Il y a une utilisation créatrice d'une notion qui a été particulièrement inspirante pour lui : l'idée du flottement de l'imagination qui oscille entre des extrêmes. Ou pour reprendre le langage poétique de Novalis : le « point lumineux du flottement » (*Lichtpunct des Schwebens*) dont « émane toute la réalité »⁹. C'est une idée d'origine fichtéenne à comprendre comme le mouvement et le travail de l'imagination productrice pour surmonter les contradictions, réconcilier l'idéal et le réel. La méthode d'universalisation que désigne le terme « encyclopédistique », autre néologisme que Novalis forge dans *Le Brouillon général*, est (selon nous) fondée sur ce travail de l'imagination ; ce n'est pas seulement une façon d'organiser les savoirs mais une façon de les achever en découvrant les choses que l'on ignore¹⁰. Walter Zimmermann s'est emparé de ce principe d'indétermination qu'est le *Schweben* de l'imagination productrice afin d'ouvrir une autre voie possible pour la composition musicale : il l'a traduit en un procédé compositionnel – ce qu'il nomme « tonalité non centrée » – qu'il a théorisé et expérimenté, d'abord dans un cycle intitulé *Sternwanderung* (1982-1984), dans lequel il mettait également en musique des textes tirés du roman de Novalis *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* sur la fleur bleue, puis dans la pièce *Novalis-Fragment* de 2013¹¹.

La tonalité est à la musique occidentale classique ce que la grammaire est au discours : c'est un système qui prescrit *a priori* des déterminations dans le flux mouvant et éphémère qu'est la matière sonore, en conférant aux notes

⁸ Voir Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Betrachtungen zur Musik. Aus dem Nachlass zusammengestellt von Walter Zimmermann auf der Basis der Transkriptionen des Wittgenstein-Archivs an der Universität Bergen*, Francfort, Suhrkamp, 2022.

⁹ Novalis, *Les années d'apprentissage philosophique. Études fichtéennes (1795-96)*, trad. fr. A. Dumont, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012, frag. 555, p. 266.

¹⁰ Sur ce point, voir Laure Cahen-Maurel, « Vers une "science totale" : l'encyclopédistique vivante de Novalis », *Klesis*, vol. 42, 2018, p. 79-109.

¹¹ Les deux pièces sont en écoute libre sur le site SoundCloud aux liens suivants : <http://home.snafu.de/walterz/07.html> ; et <https://soundcloud.com/user-985460328/novalis-fragment> (site consulté le 6 décembre 2022).

des fonctions réglées, en déterminant des rapports stables entre des valeurs fixes (les différents degrés de hauteur d'un son), des intervalles privilégiés. Le langage de la tonalité dessine un agencement de mesures, un schéma général de tension et de résolution, fait de consonances et de dissonances à rapporter, pour l'oreille, à un centre tonal. La pratique compositionnelle de la « tonalité non centrée » ne consiste pas à abandonner cette grammaire musicale. Elle vise au contraire à atteindre à « une sorte de pan-tonalité flottante » ; c'est-à-dire à laisser la musique « s'écouler dans de nouvelles directions », l'oreille « flotter entre différents centres » d'attraction, sans résolution ou recentrement sur une seule dominante¹².

Avec cette nouvelle édition du *Brouillon général*, W. Zimmermann, comme il l'explique en préface du *Novalis ABC Buch*, reprend à son compte une initiative du compositeur et musicologue Rainer Riehn. Inspiré par la proposition de John Cage intitulée « Europeras » (1987), collage musical où la sélection des éléments n'a pas été opérée par le compositeur mais par le hasard, Riehn avait eu l'idée, en 1987-1990, de composer une petite compilation des principales pensées de Novalis sur le hasard, que le *Novalis ABC Buch* reproduit en appendice (p. 281-285). L'appropriation éditoriale du *Brouillon général* par W. Zimmermann, si elle est placée sous le signe du paradoxe qu'assume la philosophie romantique de « systématiser l'absence de système »¹³, se distingue pourtant radicalement par l'esprit de l'initiative de Riehn se réclamant de Cage. Zimmermann défend l'idée d'un système où compte l'intelligibilité de la mise en rapport des parties. Il prend le contrepied de l'opinion encore dominante selon laquelle le projet de Novalis serait travaillé dans sa forme par une logique postmoderne avant la lettre de dissémination du sens ; qu'il serait marqué au sceau de l'illogisme, de la fragmentation et du chaos. Le compositeur écrit par exemple : « L'idolâtrie du fragment chez Novalis est une catégorie esthétique de la modernité, projetée sur le premier romantisme » (p. 7). Nous sommes entièrement d'accord avec lui sur le fait que les réflexions du *Brouillon général* doivent être regardées non seulement comme un ensemble d'entrées ou de divisions récurrentes plutôt que comme des fragments, mais comme la preuve que

¹² Walter-Wolfgang Sparrer, *Ursache und Vorwitz. Walter Zimmermann im Gespräch mit Richard Toop*, Hofheim, Wolke, 2019, p. 147 ; cité par José L. Besada et Moreno Andreatta dans « ...Die Musik in immer neue Richtungen fließen... : Walter Zimmermann et les carrés magiques », in Pierre Michel, Moreno Andreatta, José Luis Besada (dir.), *Les jeux subtils de la poétique, des nombres et de la philosophie. Autour de la musique de Walter Zimmermann*, Paris, Hermann, 2021, p. 141.

¹³ Novalis, *Fichte Studien* (1795/96), frag. 648, HKA 2, p. 289 ; *Les années d'apprentissage philosophique*, p. 238.

Novalis avait la certitude de l'adéquation, et non de l'inadéquation, de nos tentatives humaines de rationalisation face à la complexité de ce qui est.

Aussi Zimmermann a-t-il voulu inscrire sa nouvelle édition du *Brouillon général* sous les auspices du rationalisme des Lumières françaises, en optant pour une présentation des sujets traités à l'image de l'*Encyclopédie* de Diderot et d'Alembert. Dans le *Novalis ABC Buch*, les domaines correspondant aux sujets et choisis par Novalis lui-même se suivent dans l'ordre alphabétique. Les sujets ne sont donc pas choisis au hasard (ou sous les auspices du hasard, comme chez Riehn), ni ordonnés en vertu d'une logique prescrite de l'extérieur, comme c'était le cas de bien des compilations du *Brouillon général* antérieures à la première édition historique et critique établie par Hans-Joachim Mähl. Et comme c'est le cas en musique, dès lors que le système de la tonalité prescrit de l'extérieur des déterminations à une œuvre musicale. D'autre part, Walter Zimmermann ne reprend ici que les textes pour lesquels Novalis avait attribué une rubrique, jusqu'à l'entrée 643 ; les entrées 644 à 1151, elles, ne figurent pas dans cette édition, afin d'éviter d'imprimer au matériau primaire un classement qui lui serait étranger. En outre, lorsque plusieurs entrées relèvent d'une même rubrique (comme par exemple les mathématiques ou la physique), l'ordre chronologique de l'édition historico-critique des *Schriften* est soigneusement respecté au sein des rubriques mêmes. La numérotation des entrées de la HKA est également conservée ; et l'ouvrage est accompagné d'un tableau de concordance entre le nouvel agencement et l'édition critique. L'entreprise échappe ainsi, en partie, à la condamnation formulée par H.-J. Mähl de tout ordre de présentation autre que l'ordre chronologique strict, seul représentatif, selon le spécialiste, des proximités sémantiques et connexions voulues par Novalis.

Un classement alphabétique non seulement offre, on l'a dit, la rationalité de l'encyclopédie au sens de Diderot et d'Alembert, mais il est plus commode pour la consultation. Il ne faudrait cependant pas croire que ce choix relève, de la part de l'éditeur, d'une forme de paresse ou de formule (même si le volume des considérations de Wittgenstein sur la musique revêt lui aussi la forme de l'abécédaire). L'édition de Zimmermann montre que ce type d'organisation est pleinement pertinent, si l'on prend comme référence la déclaration des *Fragments de Teplitz*, où le terme d'« abécédaire » (*Abc-Buch*) est employé explicitement par Novalis : « Le *livre suprême* ressemble peut-être à un abécédaire »¹⁴. De l'aveu même de Novalis, il y aurait, comme le rappelle Josef Schreier, une analogie de structure entre l'ouvrage élémentaire et

¹⁴ Novalis, *Teplitzer Fragmente*, fragment 82, HKA 2, p. 610 ; « Fragments de Teplitz », trad. fr. O. Schefer, *Semences*, p. 210.

attrayant qui égrène les lettres de l'alphabet et la nouvelle Bible, cet idéal d'encyclopédie dont Novalis rêve comme d'une œuvre absolue, totale, se déployant à tous les niveaux de l'être et dans tous les domaines du savoir. Une œuvre pour apprendre à déchiffrer le langage muet, grammaire ou livre, de la nature dans toute sa diversité : nous devons, en effet, encore apprendre à lire et à dire l'univers, puisque l'« homme n'est pas seul à parler – l'univers aussi *parle* – tout parle – des langues infinies » (p. 95)¹⁵. Cela signifie qu'il est également possible de trouver pour les réalités complexes abordées dans *Le Brouillon général* une mise en ordre d'une simplicité universelle.

Cet abécédaire pour débrouiller la complexité de ce qui est va de « A » à « Z ». En positions extrêmes, au début (à la lettre « A ») et à la fin (à la lettre « Z »), se trouvent une remarque générale (*Allgemeine Bemerkung*) sur les vignettes et une réflexion relative à la théorie psychologique de l'avenir (*[Psychologische] Zukunftslehre*). La vignette est une forme d'art à la fois microscopique et microcosmique. L'exemple de vignette qui ouvre le *Novalis ABC Buch* associe dans l'image de la fleur – la poussière de pollen qu'elle émet (en allemand : *Blüthenstaub*, titre sous lequel Novalis publiait en 1798 son tout premier recueil de fragments) ; son calice – la terre et le ciel, microcosme et macrocosme. Citons cette remarque liminaire :

Toute cendre est *grain de pollen* – Le calice est le ciel¹⁶.(p. 25)

L'image évoque la métamorphose du vivant, l'éternelle renaissance de la nature, tandis qu'à l'autre extrémité du parcours, l'abécédaire se clôt sur une autre série de métamorphoses, sur un plan historique cette fois. L'ultime métamorphose est une métamorphose liée à la conscience humaine : celle de l'imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), faculté du sens interne, en sens aussi bien externe qu'interne, au lieu d'être simplement négatrice de l'extériorité. La trajectoire qui se dessine à la lecture alphabétique du *Brouillon général*, allant de la nature à l'histoire, du passé au futur, du physiologique au psychologique, a-t-elle été voulue par Novalis ? Faut-il voir dans l'un l'aboutissement de l'autre ? Si la réponse à ces questions nous échappe nécessairement, il n'en demeure pas moins qu'une telle lecture n'annule en aucun cas les connexions de l'ordre chronologique strict. Et que l'édition de Walter Zimmermann a bien le mérite de ne pas établir de hiérarchie entre les entrées, lesquelles peuvent ainsi constituer autant de centres autonomes – ce qui se matérialise dans la maquette du livre où ne figure qu'une seule entrée par

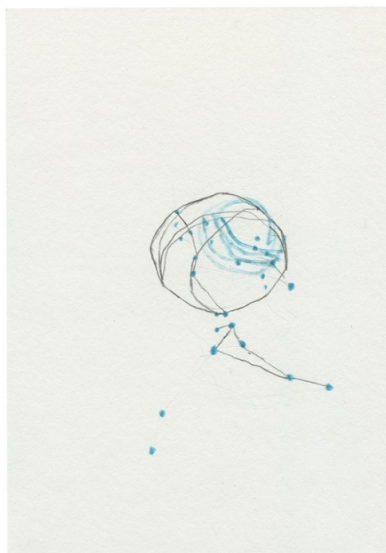
¹⁵ Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entrée 143, HKA 3, p. 267-268 ; *Le Brouillon général*, trad. fr. O. Schefer, Paris, Allia, 2000, p. 49 (trad. mod.).

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, entrée 339, HKA 3, p. 301 ; trad. fr., p. 84.

page –, tout en laissant la lecture osciller entre des directions opposées et le sens flotter dans un entre-deux où tout est indéterminé.

Poussant le principe de l'abécédaire jusqu'au bout, l'édition juxtapose aux mots de Novalis des dessins originaux de Nanne Meyer à la mine de plomb et au crayon de couleur bleu sur papier, comme autant de vignettes. La technique est représentative du style de cette artiste allemande reconnue, elle aussi, dans le domaine des arts contemporains, notamment pour les séries *Wandlungen* (« Transformations ») et *Kartografie* (qui transforme des cartes en portraits, cartographie des esprits, des animaux, le cosmos...). Le travail de Nanne Meyer privilégie, de manière générale, le médium du dessin en tant qu'il incarne – porte en sa matérialité – le processus fluctuant des jeux plus ou moins conscients de son esprit, combinant perception, expérimentation et libre association suscitée par l'évocation d'un mot. Dans le *Novalis ABC Buch*, les petits motifs que dessinent ces vignettes viennent occuper l'emplacement laissé vide dans la partie inférieure de la page, lorsque les entrées de l'abécédaire sont courtes. Au flottement de la signification des concepts et du tout que forme *Le Brouillon général* s'ajoute ainsi la figuration sensible, oscillant elle-même entre figuration et abstraction, de ce qui déborde l'expression conceptuelle. Ainsi que l'écrit l'artiste dans une note : « Les dessins mettent sous le regard ce qui résonne dans le texte au-delà de la langue, ce qui ne peut pas être exprimé par des mots et qui est pourtant présent » (p. 11).

Comme par exemple cette entrée répertoriée dans la rubrique



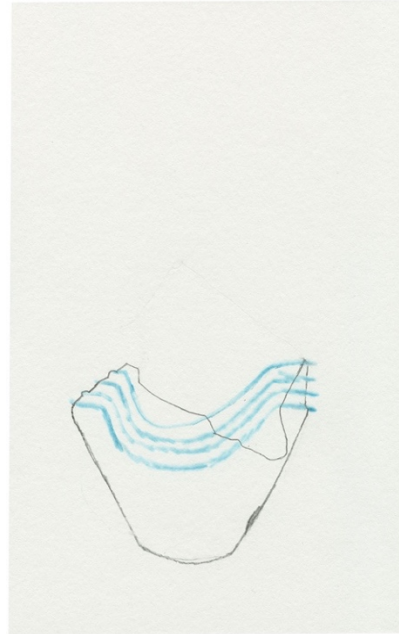
© Nanne Meyer

« THÉORIE DE LA TERRE » : « *Divisions de la terre*. Géographie philosophique et poétique. La géographie historique est la géographie *spéciale*. Continents. Fictions de l'astronomie. Images des étoiles. *Art de la photométrie*. Ne pourrait-on calculer les distances d'après la force moyenne de la lumière ? » (p. 73)¹⁷. Le dessin donne à voir l'image d'une mesure de la terre et du ciel. Les lignes noires sont comme des longitudes sur la surface du globe terrestre, passant d'un pôle à l'autre. Les traits au crayon bleu, qui encerclent l'hémisphère nord du globe, marquent, quant à eux, des régions ou « divisions » de la terre. Mais le bleu s'étend

¹⁷ Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entrée 107, HKA 3, p. 260 ; trad. fr., p. 42.

bien au-delà de la sphère du globe pour former les astres de référence de constellations.

Ou encore, la rubrique « THÉORIE DE L'ESPRIT », avec la réflexion suivante : « L'innocence authentique est une *élasticité* absolue – où aucune domination ne s'exerce » (p. 86)¹⁸. Cette entrée et le dessin qui l'accompagne sont dans l'esprit du philosophe hollandais Hemsterhuis. Ils associent la conscience morale de l'être humain (l'innocence) à une idée tirée de la mécanique de la nature (l'élasticité). Cette élasticité de conscience ne désigne donc pas, en l'occurrence, un manque de rigueur morale dans les principes ou dans les actes : elle signifie la souplesse des sentiments humains et l'état de ce qui, par nature, ne fait pas de mal à autrui, ne déborde pas sur son espace, n'exerce pas sa force sur lui pour le mettre sous sa domination, à l'instar des fils bleus distendus du dessin de Nanne Meyer, qui se rétractent à l'intérieur du volume aux contours noirs.



© Nanne Meyer

Pour toutes ces raisons, la solution proposée par Walter Zimmermann au problème d'organisation interne du *Brouillon général* est une tentative stimulante, efficace et pertinente. Nous recommandons vivement ce beau volume qui par sa composition mûrement réfléchie, ses notations musicales et ses dessins suggestifs est un *Gesamtkunstwerk* microcosmique, une « œuvre totale » à proprement parler.

3. Bilan et perspectives

Outre ces deux nouvelles parutions, le bilan des derniers soixante-dix ans de réception de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis dans la recherche est riche, tant dans le domaine de la critique que dans celui de l'édition. Sans prétendre à l'exhaustivité, nous nous en tiendrons rapidement ici au bilan éditorial de leurs œuvres et esquisserons quelques perspectives.

Il convient d'abord d'insister sur le fait que les éditions critiques et historiques de leurs œuvres respectives sont aujourd'hui sur le point d'être achevées. L'édition critique des écrits de Friedrich Schlegel, la *Kritische*

¹⁸ Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entrée 188, HKA 3, p. 273 ; trad. fr., p. 55 (trad. mod.).

Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe (KFSA), a été lancée en 1958 à l'initiative d'Ernst Behler, avec la collaboration de Jean-Jacques Anstett et Hans Eichner, aux éditions Ferdinand Schöningh. Deux ans plus tard, en 1960, démarrait l'édition déjà mentionnée des *Schriften* (*Écrits*) de Novalis, dirigée par Paul Kluckhohn et Richard Samuel chez l'éditeur Kohlhammer. Entre 1958 et aujourd'hui, ce sont ainsi, dans les deux cas, plusieurs milliers de pages et des découvertes cruciales qui ont été rendues accessibles et que les spécialistes peuvent désormais exploiter.

Commençons par Friedrich Schlegel. Sur les 35 volumes prévus de la KFSA, 31 ont paru à ce jour. C'est avant tout non seulement l'intégralité de l'œuvre poétique, critique, philosophique publié du vivant de Schlegel, mais celle du très volumineux *Nachlaß*, papiers posthumes incluant les nombreux carnets des années d'apprentissage philosophique. C'est aussi plus de la moitié de la correspondance des époux Friedrich et Dorothea Schlegel, jusqu'à la mort de celle-ci en 1839. Parmi les volumes de cette correspondance, il faut signaler la parution, cette année, des lettres qu'ils ont adressées et reçues pendant les années de guerre de libération contre Napoléon (1811-1814). Ont été également transcrits, pour la dernière des quatre divisions que comporte la KFSA, deux tiers des matériaux relatifs aux divers travaux d'édition et de traduction menés à bien par Friedrich Schlegel. Notamment sa collection de Mémoires historiques et de poèmes romantiques des Moyen Âge français et allemand. Sont encore en préparation, en revanche, l'édition de ses traductions du grec, du français et de l'espagnol. Andreas Arndt a pris la suite d'Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett et Hans Eichner ; et une nouvelle édition en ligne existe désormais sur le site des éditions Schöningh.

Novalis n'est pas en reste. Les six volumes prévus de l'édition historique et critique des *Schriften* – quatre volumes de matériaux primaires complétés par deux volumes d'*addenda* – sont également peu ou prou terminés. Les quatre premiers, soit l'œuvre poétique, l'œuvre philosophique, les journaux intimes et la correspondance, ont été publiés pour la première fois entre 1960 et 1975. Les éditions de ces matériaux ont depuis été révisées et augmentées. Le sixième et dernier volume par lequel l'édition historico-critique doit s'achever est organisé en quatre parties : les papiers de jeunesse (*Jugendnachlaß*) ayant trait à l'œuvre poétique, retrouvés à Cracovie en 1983 par Hans-Joachim Mähl ; le commentaire de ces ébauches de jeunesse ; des notes documentaires inédites mises au jour par Gerhard Schulz, liées aux activités professionnelles de Novalis comme assesseur des salines de Weissenfels ; plusieurs autres inédits biographiques, lettres, notations de Journal, listes de livres, etc. Les trois premières parties ont été publiées en volumes séparés

entre 1998 et 2006. Seule la dernière partie n'a pas encore été publiée à ce jour.

Les effets de ces éditions critiques et historiques sur la recherche et sur les traductions à l'étranger se sont très vite fait sentir. Elles ont d'abord entraîné, parmi les ouvrages de traduction (et d'étude), quelques anthologies de référence : l'anthologie due à Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire* (1978)¹⁹, qui donnait à lire pour la première fois aux lecteurs francophones les fragments de l'*Athenaeum* et les textes les plus significatifs de Friedrich Schlegel sur la théorie de la critique littéraire ; celle publiée par Frederick C. Beiser, en 1996, sous le titre *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*²⁰ ; ou encore l'anthologie *La Forme poétique du monde* publiée en 2003 par Laurent Margantin, Charles Le Blanc et Olivier Schefer²¹.

C'est surtout la place que Novalis occupe à l'étranger qui s'est considérablement étoffée grâce à l'édition des *Schriften*. Comme le rappelait Giovanni Panno en 2020²², la publication pour la première fois en Allemagne (en 1965) de l'intégralité des *Fichte-Studien*, que nous avons précédemment évoquées, est restée dans l'histoire comme celle qui a profondément renouvelé l'approche de Novalis en faisant découvrir le penseur, et pas seulement le poète²³. De plus en plus d'études sur le romantisme l'ont dès lors inclus, voire se sont entièrement consacrées à sa pensée. Et les traductions de son œuvre ont, elles aussi, connu un nouveau départ.

L'Italie a joué un rôle précurseur avec la formidable et imposante édition des œuvres philosophiques complètes de Novalis, établie par Fabrizio Desideri et Giampiero Moretti en 1993. Cette édition a été rééditée tout récemment sous le titre : *Scritti filosofici* (2019)²⁴.

Dans le monde anglo-américain, l'année 2003 a vu la première traduction anglaise du texte intégral des *Fichte-Studien* par Jane Kneller²⁵.

¹⁹ Voir Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy (éd.), *L'Absolu littéraire : théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1978.

²⁰ Voir Frederick C. Beiser, *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²¹ Voir Laurent Margantin, Charles Le Blanc, Olivier Schefer (éd.), *La Forme poétique du monde. Anthologie du romantisme allemand*, Paris, José Corti, collection « Domaine romantique », 2003.

²² Voir Giovanni Panno, « Come ordinare un sistema di asistematicità. Nota a: Novalis, *Scritti filosofici* (2019) / How to Order a System of Systemlessness. Review essay of: Novalis, *Scritti filosofici* (2019) », *Symphilosophie. Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*, vol. 1, 2019, p. 349-363.

²³ Voir Novalis, HKA 2, p. 29-298.

²⁴ Le deuxième numéro de *Symphilosophie* en a rendu compte. Voir *supra*, note 22.

²⁵ Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. and trans. by Jane Kneller, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Quatre ans plus tard, en 2007, David W. Wood donnait la première traduction complète du projet d'encyclopédie, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*²⁶. Enfin, quinze ans plus tard, James D. Reid est sur le point de faire paraître aux presses universitaires d'Oxford un troisième volume indispensable, intitulé *Novalis: Philosophical, Literary, and Poetic Writings*²⁷. L'ouvrage comprend (*Fichte-Studien* et *Allgemeines Brouillon* mis à part) l'intégralité de l'œuvre philosophique de Novalis, dont, pour la première fois – cela mérite d'être salué – l'intégralité des *Fragments logologiques* ainsi que des derniers fragments de 1799-1800. Avec les traductions déjà mentionnées de Frederick C. Beiser, Jane Kneller et David W. Wood, le lecteur anglophone pourra ainsi disposer du corpus philosophique entier ou presque. Le travail considérable de James D. Reid est complété par la retraduction intégrale des deux romans inachevés, *Les Disciples à Saïs* et *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, ainsi que la retraduction partielle des *Hymnes à la Nuit*. Une monographie intitulée (provisoirement) *Novalis's Philosophical Fictions: Magical Idealism in Context* doit par ailleurs accompagner ce volume de traductions d'un commentaire philosophique de l'œuvre romanesque.

Dans le domaine francophone, Olivier Schefer a entrepris une édition critique française des *Œuvres philosophiques de Novalis* ; elle compte à ce jour quatre volumes²⁸. Ont été traduits pour la première fois ou retraduits à partir de l'édition allemande critique des *Schriften* : les études philosophiques de 1797 sur Hemsterhuis, Kant et Eschenmayer ; les *Vorarbeiten zu verschiedenen Fragmentsammlungen* (travaux préparatoires pour différents recueils de fragments) écrits par Novalis à Freiberg durant l'année 1798 ; les recueils de fragments publiés du vivant de Novalis dans la revue *Athenaeum* entre 1798 et 1800 (*Pollen, Foi et Amour ou Le roi et la reine, Dialogues et Monologue*), ainsi que divers fragments et écrits politiques ; le projet d'encyclopédie du *Brouillon général* ; et les derniers fragments de 1799-1800. Il faut également saluer le travail d'Augustin Dumont, qui est venu à bien, quant à lui, de la première traduction française des *Fichte-Studien* de Novalis, parue en 2012²⁹. D'autre part, on lui doit encore une retraduction, dans un souci de précision et de simplicité, de trois des principales œuvres littéraires de Novalis : les recueils

²⁶ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, ed. and trans. by David W. Wood, Albany NY, SUNY Press, 2007.

²⁷ À paraître en 2023 aux presses universitaires d'Oxford.

²⁸ Voir Novalis, *Le Brouillon général* (2000, rééd. 2015), *op. cit.* ; *Le Monde doit être romantisé*, Paris, Allia, 2002 ; *Semences* (2004), *op. cit.* ; et *À la fin tout devient poésie*, Paris, Allia, 2020.

²⁹ Voir *supra* note 9.

poétiques *Hymnes à la Nuit* et *Chants spirituels*, ainsi que le roman des *Disciples à Saïs*³⁰.

Considérons, pour finir, les entreprises en cours. Il convient d'abord de rappeler ici que Frederick Beiser a été le premier à donner des extraits inédits en langue anglaise des Leçons de « Philosophie transcendantale » professées par Friedrich Schlegel à l'université d'Iéna au semestre d'hiver 1800 / 1801, dans l'anthologie *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (1996). À peu près en même temps, Denis Thouard, côté français, offrait, dans *Symphilosophie : F. Schlegel à Iéna* (2002), la toute première traduction française de l'Introduction et de la troisième partie des Leçons. Mais de ce texte, aussi surprenant que cela puisse paraître, il n'existait jusqu'à maintenant aucune traduction intégrale, que ce soit en anglais, en français ou en italien. Pour remédier à cet état de fait, Joseph Carew, co-éditeur avec Sean McGrath et Kyla Bruff du *Palgrave Schelling Handbook*³¹, a entrepris de traduire les Leçons de Schlegel dans leur intégralité en langue anglaise. Sa traduction de la première moitié de l'Introduction figure dans le présent numéro de *Symphilosophie*.

Une autre lacune importante dans le paysage des études romantiques aussi bien anglophones que francophones concerne l'édition des *Freiberger naturwissenschaftliche Studien* (1798 / 1799). Grâce à Fabrizio Desideri, une traduction de ces notes portant sur les sciences naturelles et la philosophie de la nature existe en italien, dans l'édition des *Scritti filosofici*. Mais seule une sélection partielle de ces études est disponible en anglais, en appendice du volume *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*. Une édition de l'intégralité des *Freiberger naturwissenschaftliche Studien* n'existe pas encore non plus, à ce jour, en français. Toutefois, un projet d'édition française fait partie heureusement des projets à venir ; elle est destinée à paraître dans le tome V des *Œuvres philosophiques de Novalis* traduites par Olivier Schefer aux Éditions Allia. Avec cette édition, la traduction de l'œuvre philosophique de Novalis en langue française serait pratiquement complète. Cela étant dit, il reste toutefois la correspondance générale de Novalis, dont l'essentiel demande encore à être traduit dans la plupart des langues. Nous espérons avoir montré ici, à la lumière des seules lettres à Friedrich Schlegel, que son intérêt philosophique n'était pas négligeable. Heureusement, ici aussi, une traduction française est également envisagée par Olivier Schefer, qui a déjà traduit une poignée de

³⁰ Voir Novalis, *Hymnes à la Nuit, Chants spirituels, Les Disciples à Saïs*, trad. fr. et introduction par A. Dumont, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, coll. « Bibliothèque allemande », 2014.

³¹ Voir Sean McGrath, Joseph Carew, Kyla Bruff (dir.), *The Palgrave Schelling Handbook*, Londres, Palgrave Macmillan, à paraître en mai 2023.

lettres³². Quelques-unes d'entre elles sont également disponibles en anglais dans la toute première livraison de *Symphilosophie*³³. Mais mener à bien, dans diverses langues, ces énormes projets de traduction, d'édition et de recherche ne peut sans doute qu'être le fruit d'un travail collectif. Autrement dit, deux cent cinquante ans après la naissance de Friedrich Schlegel et de Novalis, la pratique de la symphilosophie est toujours promise à un bel avenir.

³² Voir « Six lettres de Novalis à Friedrich et August Wilhelm Schlegel », trad. fr. O. Schefer, *Semences*, p. 17-30.

³³ Voir “Twelve Letters from the Romantic Circle (1798-1799)”, trad. angl. D.W. Wood, *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019), p. 167-190.

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

“Symphilosophizing”

Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel after 250 Years

*Laure Cahen-Maurel**

Nicholas Saul, Johannes Endres (eds.), *Ich liebe Deine Liebe. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis). Eine Ausstellung zum 250. Geburtstag der beiden Dichter*, Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Francfort, Göttinger Verlag der Kunst, 2022, 192 pp. ISBN 978-3-945869-13-0

Walter Zimmermann (ed.), *Novalis ABC Buch. Das „Allgemeine Brouillon“*. *Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik*, neu geordnet nach Novalis eigenen Klassifizierungen mit Zeichnungen von Nanne Meyer, Berlin, Matthes & Seitz Berlin, 2022, 312 pp. ISBN 978-3-7518-0366-3

The neologism ‘symphilosophy’ has been fateful. It has now passed into use in the ordinary language of philosophical and literary culture. Twenty years ago, Denis Thouard edited a volume of collected essays entitled, *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna*.¹ It contributed to the success of the concept of symphilosophy in the field of criticism by putting a vivid spotlight on this practice springing from the friendship between Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. There are other examples of a profound friendship between two philosophers, such as Montaigne’s with La Boétie, author of the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (1548). We recall Montaigne’s famous phrase for talking about La Boétie: “parce que c’était lui, parce que c’était moi” (because it was him, because it was me).² But the elective affinity between Novalis and Schlegel is unique with respect to the joint activities that it produced. Denis

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¹ Denis Thouard (ed.), *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna* (Paris: Vrin, 2002), with texts by Ernst Behler, Christian Berner, Donatella di Cesare, and Denis Thouard.

² Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, Livre I, Ch. 28, “De l’amitié”.

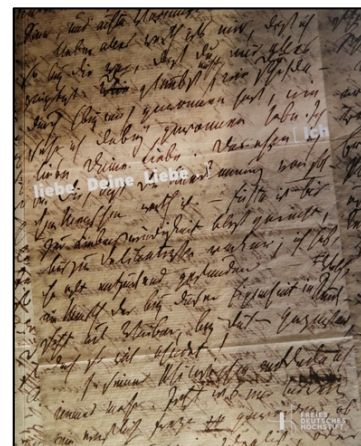
Thouard illustrates this point by referring to their shared project of an encyclopaedia. This project sought to overcome the fragmentation and heterogeneity of knowledge and allow for permutations of different points of view. This was done in order to satisfy the symphilosophical requirements of synthesis and shared intellectual work.

The two publications under review have appeared in the year 2022 to commemorate the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the births of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, who were both born in 1772. These books provide an opportunity to reconsider the above central topics of German romanticism, namely, symphilosophy and encyclopaedism, and to make a brief assessment of the state of the editions and selected translations of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. Researchers who make an effort to return to the original sources acknowledge the valuable work of editing and translating texts. It is therefore important to give an account of them.

1. “Symphilosophy with Hardenberg. In letters.”

Even though the term symphilosophy appears more frequently in the writings of Friedrich Schlegel than Novalis, it is difficult to establish with certainty which of the two actually coined this neologism. That said, the written correspondence they exchanged allows us to observe the intellectual evolution and concrete practice of the joint philosophizing in these two romantic thinkers. The recent exhibition *‘Ich liebe Deine Liebe’. - Der Briefwechsel zwischen Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis)* (‘I love your love.’ – The correspondence between Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis)) attempted to highlight precisely this form of shared collaboration. It was held at the new Deutsches Romantik-Museum in Frankfurt, from April 26 to September 8, 2022.

This event deserves to be praised not just for its own sake but for resulting in an important addition to the textual corpus, the exhibition catalogue. The exhibition displayed seven years of correspondence between the two friends, from 1793 until 1800. They had first met at the University of Leipzig one year before, in 1792. This material is essential for better understanding the idea of ‘romanticism’, an intellectual category that was under constant construction. In terms of quantity, the exhibition offered the most extensive presentation ever of the handwritten manuscripts of the correspondence held by the Freies Deutsches Hochstift. Fifty-four letters, plus two



copies of letters. Accordingly, it showcased fifty-six of the sixty-two extant letters (out of probably one hundred in total) that were exchanged by the two romantic thinkers. Twenty-five of the sixty-two letters are from Novalis, the other thirty-seven are from Schlegel. Thus, the number of letters preserved on both sides is sufficiently balanced to make this correspondence a proper object of study. From a qualitative point of view, this correspondence goes beyond mere social niceties and the purely biographical dimension: it unquestionably belongs to the domain of romantic philosophy itself. The letters belong the new genre of philosophical writing advocated by the romantics, while epistolary writing as such is the main impetus for their practice of *symphilosophizing*.

Published by Göttinger Verlag der Kunst, *Ich liebe Deine Liebe* is much more than a gorgeous exhibition catalogue. It additionally achieves the goal of restoring an intellectual prestige to the correspondence, which can often be undervalued in philosophical studies on romanticism. The musical score as it were of the symphilosophizing carried out by Novalis and Schlegel veritably resounds from its pages. The book is co-authored by the curators of the exhibition, who are two renowned specialists of German Romanticism: Nicholas Saul, Professor of German Literature and History of Ideas at Durham University and current President of the International Novalis Society; and Johannes Endres, Professor of Literature and History of Art at the University of California at Riverside, who has written and edited a textbook on the life and work of Friedrich Schlegel, published by Metzler.

The catalogue’s 192 pages are arranged in a chronological thread. This thread is divided into six biographical epochs called “episodes”³ and these epochs are interspersed with extracts from the correspondence which are commented upon by the editors. The book receives its originality from the fact that within this linear presentation of the letters the episodes still remain open to a thematic path. The headings of these six biographical episodes are i). University Studies and Early Grief, ii). Civil Vocation and Literary Calling, iii). Surfeit of Life and Polemics, iv). Symphilosophy and Epistolary Exchange, v). Encyclopaedia and Bible, vi). Illness and Departure. While some of the topics covered include: the writer’s craft, criticism, philosophy, science, republicanism, ancient Greece, women, and so on. Each page has a distinctive layout: a topic is extracted from a letter and commented upon by Nicholas Saul and Johannes Endres. The commentary is frequently embellished by a rich colour iconography that further brings to life the contents of

³ The exhibition was organized into six successive times, showing each time to the public a different ‘episode’ in the evolution of this epistolary material.

the handwriting – e.g. we find well-known contemporary portraits (Caroline Böhmer, Dorothea Veit, Sophie von Kühn, Julie von Charpentier et al); various paintings, drawings, or engravings (such as Martin Schongauer's *Saint John the Evangelist in Patmos*); as well as documents from the period (frontispieces and pages from first editions etc.). However, the main bulk of the catalogue (144 pages) is devoted to a commentary of the letters. The appendix contains a transcription of thirty selected letters.

The book is not a philosophical commentary on the correspondence (that's not its purpose), but it still manages to highlight how much these letters are a kind of laboratory of thought, opening up fresh lexical and conceptual creations. We discover other examples of neologisms invented by Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis that did not become as well known as the word symphilosophy. For instance, the neologism *epichronism* created by Novalis: the term means something like an extension or filling out of the present time, in opposition to the regressive 'anachronism' where a fact is placed before its date (p. 47). This recalls the powerful extension that Walter Benjamin's concept of 'actuality' (in his *Theses on the Concept of History*) gave to the romantic idea of experiencing the intensity and density of the historical present. It becomes associated with the concept of elasticity, in contrast to the quantitative and mechanical conception of an empty and homogeneous physical time.

In the letters, the term 'symphilosophy' inaugurates an entire series of lexical forms with the same prefix *sym-*: there is 'sympoiesis', 'sympraxis', 'symphysics', 'symorganization', 'symevolution', etc. 'Symphilosophy' is first used in the correspondence and occurs the greatest number of times there. After a latent period of two years between 1794 and 1796 when the letters between Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis were interrupted, the term symphilosophy first appears in the letters of September 1797 and May 1798 when they started writing to each other again.

Symphilosophy arose out of the two friends' earlier practice of *fichtisiren*, which is a verb referring to their joint discussions of Fichte's philosophy in Jena in the winter of 1796. After this reading of the first published version of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, Friedrich Schlegel wanted to extend their symphilosophizing to the field of writing, especially within the framework of his new journal, the *Athenaeum*. Under Schlegel's pen, the neologism acquires a philological slant. He writes to Novalis on 26 September 1797:

I am impatiently looking forward to your philosophical communications. Even though *symphilosophy* is the true name for our association, don't be parsimonious and only restrict it to this field. - It would be

wonderful if I could also render you *diaskeuastēs* services in philosophy.
(p. 166; commentary p. 84)

That is, Schlegel is offering Novalis his services as a scribe, copyist, editor, and compiler. But it is the correspondence that will become the proper place of symphilosophy. The fourth episode of the exhibition catalogue (Symphilosophy and Epistolary Exchange) especially illustrates this point. Schlegel writes again to Novalis on May 28, 1798:

Doesn't the epistolary form suit you more for your philosophical essays and other pieces? If you like the idea of an epistolary symphilosophy, I'll put together a plan; of course, in order to promote freedom and not to restrict it. (p. 171)

During the following summer, Schlegel jots down this passage in his notebooks: “Symphilosophy with Hardenberg. In the form of letters. He's a magician; I'm merely a prophet.”⁴ From 1798 onwards, their ‘epistolary symphilosophy’ intensifies in the context of joint reflections on the projects of an encyclopedia and a new ‘Bible’ (see episode 5).

It is striking to note while reading the correspondence how the relationship between the disciple and master eventually becomes reversed. At the beginning of their letters, Novalis describes himself as a student whose mind is still developing and who has lost his philosophical innocence under the influence of Friedrich Schlegel. In the first half of August 1793, for example, Hardenberg confides to Schlegel: “For me, you have been the high priest of Eleusis. Through you, I have learned to know heaven and hell; to taste the fruits of the tree of knowledge” (p. 149). Friedrich Schlegel was of course a philologist by training. With the publication of his first writings on Greek poetry in 1794, he embarked on a career as a literary historian and critic. Novalis considers himself to have been educated by Schlegel in this historical sense. After Schlegel renewed the contact between them, Hardenberg replied on 8 July, 1796: “You know how much you have contributed to my education in the past. Even the most ordinary gratitude does not forget its master. Every thought in which I tested my historical culture is linked to your memory” (p. 154).

A concrete example of Friedrich Schlegel's historical culture is his review of Kant's pamphlet *On Perpetual Peace*. He published this review in August 1796 in the journal *Deutschland* under the title *Essay on the Concept of*

⁴ Friedrich Schlegel, Summer 1798. Cited in *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (= HKA), ed. by P. Kluckhohn, R. Samuel, H.-J. Mähl, G. Schulz *et al.* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–), vol. 4, p. 621.

Republicanism. In his essay, Schlegel takes Kant's thesis a step further by defending a truly democratic form of the Republic based on the model of ancient Greece. It is a vision of peace based on fraternity. Schlegel's historically informed conception anticipates Novalis's later vision of a universal revolution – a future golden age – which if not utopian, is at least forward-looking and encompasses politics, morality, art, and science.

Beyond the fields of history and politics, the letters reveal that Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis mutually guided one another in difficult philosophical readings of Fichte, Kant, Schelling, as well as Hemsterhuis, Plato, and Spinoza. We can detect the image of Ariadne's thread, which she gave to Theseus to help guide him through Daedalus's labyrinth, behind Novalis's following June 1797 words to Friedrich Schlegel:

Fichte is the most dangerous thinker I know. He firmly enchants a person within his circle. [...] You have been elected to protect from Fichte's magic everyone who strives to think for themselves. I've personally experienced how bitter this understanding can be. I am indebted to you alone, and to the idea I have of your free and critical mind, for the many hints and signs that have helped me to orient myself in this frightful labyrinth of abstractions. (pp. 164-165)

Here Novalis again places himself under the aegis of Friedrich Schlegel by acknowledging that he owes his freer reading of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* to his friend's independence of spirit. Yet it is precisely during the earlier period of their symphilosophy when they are Fichticizing together, especially after Novalis had written his *Fichte Studies*, which reveals that Novalis is "clearly the true philosophical mind of the two" (p. 7), in the words of Nicholas Saul and Johannes Endres. Here the two editors are in agreement with Manfred Frank, for whom Novalis's studies on Fichte's *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794 / 1795) are the most philosophical text in the entire romantic corpus. Thus, whereas Novalis placed Schlegel in the position of master at the beginning of their correspondence, from 1797 onwards it is Friedrich Schlegel who now takes on the role of the pupil. He writes to Novalis on May 5: "Wouldn't it be nice if we could sit alone together for a few days and philosophize, or as we used to say, *Fichticize*" (letter transcribed p. 163). And on June 21: "I'm sure I could learn as much from you and your writing as I've learned from Fichte."⁵

⁵ Cited by Nicholas Saul and Johannes Endres in the Introduction to the catalogue, p. 7. Cf. *Friedrich Schlegel – Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke* (= KFSA), ed. Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett, and Hans Heichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–), vol. II, p. 374.

But what the correspondence ultimately shows is the extent to which their symphilosophical thinking is nourished as much by tensions and divergences in opinion as it is by convergences. These “ambivalences of symphilosophy” are underlined by Nicholas Saul and Johannes Endres (p. 86). As early as August 1793 the two friends saw themselves advancing on the same road, but in opposite directions: Friedrich Schlegel in the direction of the east, Novalis towards the west (p. 39). Five years later they are essentially travelling on two different paths. Friedrich Schlegel talks about their “dualism of symphilosophy”⁶ in a crucial letter of 2 December 1798, emphasizing in particular the major differences between his own and Novalis’s conceptions of encyclopedism and a new ‘Bible’: while the Bible project has an inherently religious aim for Schlegel, Novalis’s new Bible will be at once scientific, philosophical, and literary.

2. Learning to Read the Universe. Novalis’s ABC Book

Unlike the correspondence, which can be conveniently presented in a strictly chronological fashion, Novalis’s thousand or so preparatory notes written in 1798-1799 for his “scientific Bible”, which have come down to us under the title *Das allgemeine Brouillon* (The General Draft), raise the question of their internal organization. Novalis himself had not entirely fixed the final composition of these pages, which then became dispersed at his death. Apparently, Schlegel wasn’t able to play here the symphilosophical role of the *diaskeuastēs*, by taking on the task of rereading the drafts, extracting and collecting notes deemed suitable for publication, or rejecting those of lesser value. The *Brouillon* is a set of more or less developed heterogeneous notes. The text moves without any apparent progression from the sciences of nature to the sciences of the spirit, from the principles of matter to the principles of human intelligence, from terrestrial realities to spiritual realities, and vice-versa. However, Novalis himself had actually foreseen a more semantically appropriate organization for this initially confusing corpus. Towards the end of October 1798, the poet-philosopher began to order these notes and classify them with specific subject headings, such as chemistry, medicine, astronomy, cosmology, theory of the future, theory of education, encyclopedistics, and many others. But the classification of this mass of notes was never completed by Novalis. Nor did he alphabetically arrange or number the entries; the numbering was added by later editors. Of the 1151 notes, 643 of them are

⁶ Friedrich Schlegel, letter to Friedrich von Hardenberg, 2 December 1798, KFSa XXIV, 206.

listed under subject headings; that is to say, approximately only half the notes which make up the *Brouillon*.

Novalis broke off his work of classifying the entries and we will probably never know what he had in mind as the text's final form. Both in terms its method and content, the *Brouillon* is still awaiting a comprehensive interpretation. And the editor of a text such as this, aware that the traditional meaning of the word 'encyclopedia' does not altogether capture Novalis's program, would have no other choice than to publish these materials in the chronological order in which they were written. This was Hans-Joachim Mähl's approach in the third volume of *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs* (HKA) – the historical and critical edition of Novalis's work.

Fifty-seven years after the first critical edition in the HKA, the contemporary German composer Walter Zimmermann has attempted something new, and taken up again the thread of the encyclopedia project at the point where Novalis interrupted it. Under the title *Novalis ABC Buch*, published by Matthes & Seitz Berlin, Zimmermann has edited a partial reprint of *Das allgemeine Brouillon: Materialien zur Enzyklopädistik*. Resulting from a collaboration with the Germanist Josef Schreier, who wrote the introduction to the volume, and the visual artist Nanne Meyer, the book is a 'total' work in the sense of an encyclopedia written in words, but as we shall see, it is also a work in images and sounds. This is because in Zimmermann's mind, a fresh presentation of the scientific considerations of the *Brouillon* can allow it to serve as a matrix for transposing and transcribing textual notations into musical structures.

Walter Zimmermann, whose reputation is well established, belongs to a line of composers who have an intimate bond with philosophy, which is founded on a personal questioning of the work of certain of their favorite authors. He shares a continuity in this field with John Cage. This editorial work is not Zimmermann's first attempt. He also published in 2022 with Suhrkamp a collection of reflections from Wittgenstein's posthumous papers on musical experience and the limits of language, especially philosophical



discourse, for describing this musical experience.⁷ In addition to Novalis and Wittgenstein, Nietzsche is another thinker whose work Walter Zimmermann has tackled from the perspective of music, in a volume of aphorisms entitled *Afrikanische Heiterkeit - Nietzsche zur Musik* (Beginner Press).

But Zimmermann is much more than a person who has edited Novalis’s work. A certain idea is particularly inspiring to him: it is the idea of the hovering of the imagination that oscillates between two extremes. In Novalis’s poetic language: the “light-point of oscillation” (*Lichtpunkt des Schwebens*) from which “all reality radiates.”⁸ This idea is Fichtean in origin, and where the movement and work of the productive imagination strives to overcome contradictions in the world, to reconcile the ideal and the real. The term ‘encyclopedistics’ is another neologism coined by Novalis in the *Brouillon*. It designates a method that is likewise based on this synthesizing work of the imagination. Encyclopedistics is not merely a manner of organizing scientific knowledge but a method of extending it by discovering things that are still unknown.⁹ Walter Zimmermann has creatively seized upon this principle of indeterminacy to open up another possible compositional path: he transposes the *Schweben* of the productive imagination into a compositional process that he calls “non-centered tonality.” – He theorized and experimented with this process in a cycle entitled *Sternwanderung* (1982-1984), and again in the 2013 piece, *Novalis-Fragment*.¹⁰ *Sternwanderung* (Star Wandering) set to music passages from Novalis’s novel of the blue flower, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

Tonality is to Western classical music what grammar is to speech: it is a system that prescribes a priori determinations in the moving and ephemeral flux that is the matter of sound. It confers regulated functions on the notes, and determines stable relationships between fixed values (the different degrees in the pitch of a sound) and privileged intervals. The language of tonality draws a measured arrangement, a general scheme of tension and resolution, consisting of consonances and dissonances, which for the ear are to be related to a tonal center. The compositional practice of “non-centered

⁷ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Betrachtungen zur Musik. Aus dem Nachlass zusammengestellt von Walter Zimmermann auf der Basis der Transkriptionen des Wittgenstein-Archivs an der Universität Bergen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2022).

⁸ Novalis, *Fichte-Studies*, edited and translated by Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), frag. 555, p. 164.

⁹ For further details on this point, see Laure Cahen-Maurel, “Vers une ‘science totale’ : l’encyclopédistique vivante de Novalis”, *Klesis* 42 (2018): 79-109.

¹⁰ These two pieces can be freely listened to on the SoundCloud website at the following links: <http://home.snafu.de/walterz/07.html>; and <https://soundcloud.com/user-985460328/novalis-fragment>.

tonality” does not consist in abandoning this musical grammar. On the contrary, it aims at attaining “a kind of hovering pan-tonality”. That is to say, to let the music “flow in new directions” and the ear “hover between different centers” of attraction, without resolution or refocusing on a single dominant center.¹¹

Zimmermann explains in the preface to the *Novalis ABC Buch* that this new edition of the *Brouillon* continues an initiative by the composer and musicologist Rainer Riehn. Inspired by John Cage’s proposal entitled *Européras* (1987), a musical collage in which the selection of elements was not made by the composer but by chance, Riehn had the idea in 1987-1990 of composing a small compilation of Novalis’s main thoughts on the topic of chance, which the *Novalis ABC Buch* reprints in an appendix (pp. 281-285). Nevertheless, though placed under the paradoxical sign of romantic philosophy that must “systematize systemlessness”¹², Zimmermann’s editorial appropriation of the *Brouillon* is still rather radically different in spirit to Riehn’s initiative. Zimmermann defends the idea of a system where an intelligibility holds in the relation between the parts. His view is diametrical to an opinion still prevalent in the research that the form of Novalis’s *Brouillon* project is characterized by a postmodern conception in which its meaning is marked by illogic, fragmentation, and chaos. The composer writes: “The idolatry of the fragment in Novalis is a modern aesthetic category that has been projected onto early romanticism” (p. 7). We fully agree with him that the reflections in the *Brouillon* are not fragments *per se* but a set of recurring entries or classifications. They should be viewed as evidence that Novalis was certain of the sufficiency rather than the insufficiency of our human attempts to rationalize in the face of the complexity of what exists.

In this respect, Zimmermann prefers to place his new *Brouillon* edition under the auspices of the rationalism of the French Enlightenment, opting for a presentation that treats the subjects in the manner of Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. Accordingly, the classifications of the subject headings that were created by Novalis are arranged in the *Novalis ABC Buch* in alphabetical order. Hence, the subjects are not selected at random (or

¹¹ Walter-Wolfgang Sparrer, *Ursache und Vorwitz. Walter Zimmermann im Gespräch mit Richard Toop* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2019), 147; cited by José L. Besada and Moreno Andreatta in: “...Die Musik in immer neue Richtungen fließen... : Walter Zimmermann et les carrés magiques”, in: Pierre Michel, Moreno Andreatta, José Luis Besada (eds.), *Les jeux subtils de la poétique, des nombres et de la philosophie. Autour de la musique de Walter Zimmermann* (Paris: Hermann, 2021), 141.

¹² Novalis, *Fichte Studien* (1795 / 1796), frag. 648, HKA 2: 289; Novalis, *Fichte-Studies*, p. 187.

under the sign of chance, like in Riehn), nor are they ordered according to some kind of an externally enforced logic, as was the case with many compilations of the *Brouillon* prior to the HKA. That kind of external logic would be similar to the case in music where the system of tonality prescribes determinations for the musical work from the outside. Zimmermann’s edition, in contrast, only includes those entries for which Novalis assigned a classificatory subject heading, i.e. up to entry number 643 in the HKA; the final entries 644 to 1151 are omitted, in order to avoid assigning any kind of extraneous classification to the source material. Furthermore, if several entries fall under the same subject heading (e.g. under mathematics or physics), then the chronological order of the historical-critical edition is still carefully adhered to within the entries themselves. The numbering of the HKA entries has also been retained, and the work is accompanied by a table of concordance between the new arrangement and the critical edition. The work, therefore, partly circumvents H.-J. Mähl’s rejection of any other presentation than a strictly chronological one. Indeed, according to the specialist Mähl, a chronological ordering is the only form that is representative of the semantic proximities and interconnections intended by Novalis.

This alphabetical classification of the entries not only places the work in the encyclopedia tradition of the French rationalists, but makes it more convenient to consult. It should not be thought that this choice is the result of a formulaic choice on the part of the editor (for the volume of Wittgenstein’s considerations on music is similarly in the form of an ABC book). Zimmermann’s edition shows that this type of alphabetical arrangement is thoroughly appropriate for the *Brouillon*. We only have to recall Novalis’s statement in the Teplitz Fragments, where the term “alphabet book” (*Abc-Buch*) is explicitly used: “The *supreme book* perhaps resembles an alphabet book.”¹³ As Josef Schreier recalls, there is an analogous structure between an elementary book spelling out the letters of the alphabet and Novalis’s project of a new scientific Bible. The latter was the ideal of an encyclopaedia. It aimed to be an absolute and total book unfolding on every level of being and encompassing every field of knowledge. A book for learning to decipher the silent language and grammar of the book of nature in all its diversity. We still have to learn to read and understand the language of the universe, since “it is not only the human being that speaks – the universe also

¹³ Novalis, *Teplitzer Fragmente*, fragment 82, HKA 2: 610.

speaks – everything speaks – infinite languages.”¹⁴ This signifies that it is also possible to find an ordering of universal simplicity for the complex realities that the *Brouillon* attempts to approach.

This ABC book for deciphering this complexity of existence runs from “A” to “Z”. The first entry under A is a general remark (*Allgemeine Bemerkung*) on the *vignette* as an art form, with the last under Z a pertinent reflection on the psychological theory of the future (*[Psychologische] Zukunftslehre*). The vignette is at once microscopic and microcosmic. This particular reflection on the vignette that opens the *Novalis ABC Book* is the image of a flower. Here the earthly flower’s pollen and calyx become associated with the sky or heavens, or the microcosm with the macrocosm (*Pollen – Blütenstaub* – is also the title of Novalis’s first 1798 collection of fragments). Let’s quote this first opening remark:

All ash is *pollen* – the calyx is heaven.¹⁵

This image under A evokes the metamorphosis of the living, eternal rebirth of nature, while at the other end of the journey under Z, the book closes with another series of metamorphoses, this time on a historical level. The ultimate metamorphosis is one linked to human consciousness: the metamorphosis of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*), a faculty of the internal sense, into an external and internal power, instead of being simply a negation of exteriority. Was the trajectory that now emerges from this alphabetical reading of the *Brouillon*, from nature to history, from the past to the future, from the physiological to the psychological, originally envisaged by Novalis himself? If the answer to this question necessarily eludes us, the fact remains that such a reading does not cancel the connections of a strict chronological order. On the contrary, Walter Zimmermann’s edition has the merit of not establishing a hierarchy between the entries, each of which might constitute an autonomous center. This is evident in the visual layout of the book, where only one entry is printed on each page. It allows the reading to oscillate between opposing directions, and the meaning to hover in an in-between space, where everything is still indeterminate.

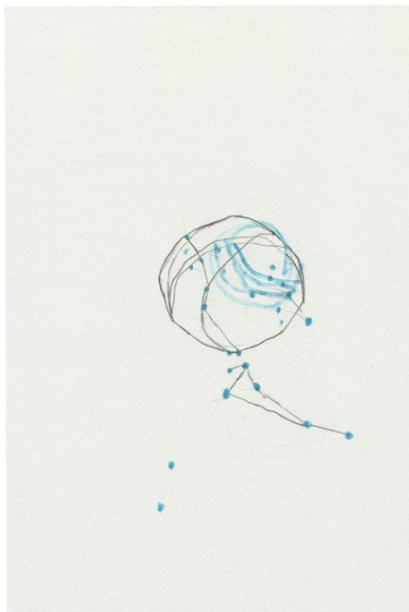
Fully exploring the possibilities of an alphabet book, this edition furthermore juxtaposes, like vignettes, numerous original drawings by Nanne

¹⁴ *Novalis ABC Buch*, p. 95. Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 143, HKA 3: 267-268; *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), 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25. Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 339, HKA 3: 301; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 51.

Meyer, in graphite and blue pencil on paper, with Novalis’s own words. The technique is distinctive of the style of this German artist, who is well-known in the field of contemporary art, notably for her series *Wandlungen* (Transformations) and *Kartografie* (changing maps into portraits, and mapping spirits, animals, the cosmos...). Nanne Meyer’s work favours the medium of drawing to embody – or bear in its materiality – the fluctuating process of the more or less conscious games of her mind, which combine perception, experimentation, and free association, prompted by the evocation of a word. In the *Novalis ABC Buch*, the delicate motifs of these drawn vignettes fill the empty space in the lower part of the page when the written alphabetical entries are brief.

In addition to the meaning of the concepts that hover in the *Brouillon*, there is a sensitive figuration that exceeds conceptualization. It oscillates between figuration and abstraction. As the artist Nanne Meyer writes in a note: “The drawings place before our eyes what resonates in the text beyond language, what cannot be expressed in words, but is present nonetheless” (p. 11). Consider, for instance, the entry listed under the heading THEORY OF THE EARTH. It reads: “*Classifications of the earth. Philosophical and poetic geography. Historical geography is the specialized geography. Continents. Fictions of astronomy. Constellations. Art of measuring light. Couldn’t we calculate distances according to the average strength of light?*”¹⁶ The drawing



© Nanne Meyer

visually express this idea of the earth’s measurement. Black lines, like longitudinal classifications, stretch across the surface of the globe, extending from one pole to the other. Blue pencil lines, encircle the northern hemisphere of the globe, further marking the world’s regions. But the blue shoots beyond the sphere of the earthly globe to form reference points as it were of stars in the heavenly constellations. Or take the entry headed THEORY OF THE SPIRIT, which

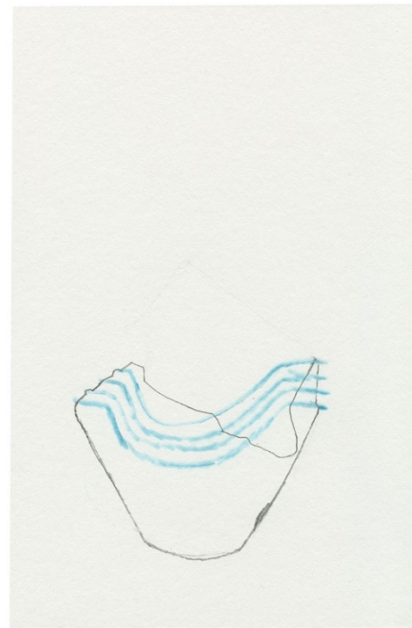
contains the following reflection: “True innocence – is absolute *elasticity* – not to *overpower*.”¹⁷ This entry and accompanying drawing are in the spirit of the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73. Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 107, HKA 3: 260; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86. Cf. *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, entry 188, HKA 3: 273; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 29.

Dutch philosopher Hemsterhuis. They interlink the moral consciousness of the human being (innocence) with an idea from mechanical nature (elasticity). In this case, this elasticity of consciousness designates the positive flexibility of human feeling and not a negative lack of moral rigour. Like the distended blue threads of Nanne Meyer's drawing, innocence does not seek to dominate another person's space, but calmly reposes inside the volume with its black contours.

For all the reasons above, Walter Zimmermann's proposed solution to the problem of how to internally organize Novalis's *Brouillon* is an extremely stimulating, effective, and judicious attempt. We warmly recommend this beautiful volume, which with its thoughtful composition, musical allusions, and evocative drawings, is a microcosmic *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art in its own right.



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3. Assessment and Perspectives

Besides these two new commemorative publications, the last seventy years have yielded a rich balance sheet in the reception of the work of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, both in the field of critical research and in the domain of publishing. Without any claim at all to exhaustively, we will confine ourselves here to a brief assessment of the state of their editions and outline some future perspectives.

First of all, it should be noted that the critical and historical editions of their respective works are both on the verge of being completed. The critical edition of Friedrich Schlegel's writings, the *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* (KFSA), published by Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, was launched in 1958 under the initiative of Ernst Behler, with the collaboration of Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner. The Historical Critical Edition (HKA) of Novalis's *Schriften* (Writings) was begun two years later in 1960, published by Kohlhammer Verlag, and edited by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel. Since then, thousands of pages of texts have become accessible to scholars and many crucial discoveries have been made.

Starting with Friedrich Schlegel. Of the 35 volumes planned for the KFSA, 31 have been published to date. It not only contains the entire poetic,

critical, and philosophical work published by Schlegel during his lifetime, but also the voluminous *Nachlaß* or posthumous papers, which include the numerous notebooks written during the years of his philosophical apprenticeship. It also has more than half the general correspondence of the couple Friedrich and Dorothea Schlegel, up until her death in 1839. Here it is worth mentioning the publication this year of the letters they sent and received during the war of liberation against Napoleon (1811-1814). The last four divisions of the KFSA contain two-thirds of the material from Friedrich Schlegel’s various editing and translation projects. The latter include his collection of historical memoirs and romantic poems from the French and German Middle Ages. The editions of his translations from the Greek, French and Spanish, are currently being prepared. Andreas Arndt has now taken over from Ernst Behler, Jean-Jacques Anstett and Hans Eichner. A new online edition available on the website of the publisher Schönningh is welcome news for the research.

The Novalis HKA edition is not far behind. The six planned volumes of the historical and critical edition of the *Schriften* – four volumes of primary material supplemented by two volumes of addenda and commentary – are also more or less complete. The first four volumes – the poetic works, philosophical works, diaries and correspondence – were published between 1960 and 1975. Since then editions of these materials have been revised and expanded. The sixth and final volume that will complete the HKA, is organized into four parts or separate sub-volumes: i). the Juvenilia (*Jugendnachlaß*) found in Krakow in 1983 by Hans-Joachim Mähl, and which mostly concerns Novalis’s earliest poetic texts; ii). a commentary on these youthful writings; iii). unpublished documentary notes unearthed by Gerhard Schulz, which relate to Novalis’s professional activities as assessor of the salt works in Weissenfels, as well as other unpublished biographical material, letters, diary entries, book lists, etc. The first three of these sub-volumes were published between 1998 and 2006. Only the final fourth one is yet to be published.

These critical and historical editions immediately made a huge impact on the research and on foreign translations. To begin with, they resulted in a number of anthologies of reference, including the well-known anthology by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *L’Absolu littéraire* (1978)¹⁸, which granted access for the first time to French-speaking readers the *Athenaeum* fragments and Friedrich Schlegel’s most significant texts on the

¹⁸ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy (eds.), *L’Absolu littéraire : théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1978). Partial English translation: *The Literary Absolute* (Albany / N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1988).

theory of literary criticism; another anthology by Frederick C. Beiser, which appeared in 1996, with the title *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*¹⁹; or the 2003 anthology *La Forme poétique du monde*, by Laurent Margantin, Charles Le Blanc, and Olivier Schefer.²⁰

Thanks to the HKA, Novalis's intellectual standing abroad has considerably heightened. As Giovanni Panno recalls²¹, the publication for the first time in Germany (in 1965) of the complete *Fichte-Studien*, was a turning point in the scholarly history and reception of Novalis, profoundly renewing approaches to his work by revealing the thinker and not just the poet.²² The HKA has also provided a huge impetus to translators.

In this regard, Italy has long played a pioneering role, with the impressive edition of Novalis's complete philosophical works, edited and translated by Fabrizio Desideri and Giampiero Moretti, published in 1993. This edition was recently reprinted under the title: *Scritti filosofici* (2019).²³

In the English-speaking world, the year 2003 saw Jane Kneller publish the first English translation of the complete text of the *Fichte-Studies*.²⁴ Shortly after in 2007, David W. Wood finished the first complete translation of Novalis's encyclopedia project, under the title: *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das allgemeine Brouillon*.²⁵ Fifteen years later, James D. Reid is about to publish a third indispensable volume, *Novalis: Philosophical, Literary, and Poetic Writings*.²⁶ The translations will make available for the first time in English the complete text of the Logological Fragments, the last fragments of 1799-1800, and many others. Thus, together with the above-mentioned translations by Frederick C. Beiser, Jane Kneller and David W. Wood, English-speaking readers will now have at their disposal virtually the complete philosophical corpus. James D. Reid's book furthermore contains complete retranlations of Novalis's two unfinished novels, *The Disciples at Sais* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, as well as a partial retranlation of the

¹⁹ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁰ Laurent Margantin, Charles Le Blanc, Olivier Schefer (eds.), *La Forme poétique du monde. Anthologie du romantisme allemand* (Paris: José Corti, collection « Domaine romantique », 2003).

²¹ See Giovanni Panno, "Come ordinare un sistema di asistematicità. Nota a: Novalis, *Scritti filosofici* (2019)" / "How to Order a System of Systemlessness. Review essay of: Novalis, *Scritti filosofici* (2019)", *Symphilosophie* 2 (2020): 349-363.

²² See HKA 2: 29-298.

²³ Reviewed in issue 2 of *Symphilosophie*. See above footnote no. 21.

²⁴ See above footnote no. 8.

²⁵ 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).

²⁶ Forthcoming in 2023 with Oxford University Press.

Hymns to the Night. A monograph provisionally entitled *Novalis’s Philosophical Fictions: Magical Idealism in Context*, will accompany the volume of translations with a philosophical commentary.

In the Francophone world, Olivier Schefer has undertaken a French critical edition of Novalis’s complete philosophical works. Titled *Œuvres philosophiques de Novalis*, the first volume was published in 2000 by Allia in Paris, and the edition has now reached four volumes.²⁷ The texts in this French edition have been translated for the first time or re-translated using the HKA as a basis. They include: the philosophical studies of 1797 on Hemsterhuis, Kant, and Eschenmayer; the preparatory works for various collections of fragments written by Novalis in Freiberg in the year 1798; the collections of fragments published in the *Athenaeum* journal between 1798 and 1800, as well as various fragments and political writings; the *Brouillon* encyclopedia project; and the final fragments of 1799-1800. The translation work of Augustin Dumont is also to be commended. In 2012 he published the first-ever French translation of Novalis’s *Fichte-Studien*, under the title *Les années d’apprentissage philosophique. Études fichtéennes (1795-96)*.²⁸ He has also retranslated three of Novalis’s main literary works: the poetic collections *Hymnes à la Nuit* (Hymns to the Night) and *Chants spirituels* (Spiritual Songs), and the novel *Disciples à Saïs* (Disciples to Saïs).²⁹

Turning to current editorial and translation projects. To begin with, we recall that Frederick Beiser was the first to provide a number of excerpts in English of Friedrich Schlegel’s Jena 1800 / 1801 *Lectures on Transcendental Philosophy*, in his anthology *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (1996); while not long after on the French side, Denis Thouard offered the first French translation of the Introduction and the third part of these lectures in his volume, *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna* (2002). Somewhat incredibly, however, no full translation of Schlegel’s text has ever been carried out in either English, French, or Italian. This state of affairs is being remedied. Joseph Carew, co-editor with Sean McGrath and Kyla Bruff of the *Palgrave Schelling Handbook*³⁰, has now begun to translate into English these lectures

²⁷ See Novalis, *Le Brouillon général* (Paris: Allia, 2000, reprint 2015); *Le Monde doit être romantisé* (Paris: Allia, 2002); *Semences* (2004); and *À la fin tout devient poésie*, (Paris: Allia, 2020).

²⁸ Novalis, *Les années d’apprentissage philosophique. Études fichtéennes (1795-96)*, translated into French and introduced by A. Dumont (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2012) .

²⁹ Novalis, *Hymnes à la Nuit, Chants spirituels, Les Disciples à Saïs*, translated and introduced by A. Dumont (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2014).

³⁰ Sean McGrath, Joseph Carew, Kyla Bruff (eds.), *The Palgrave Schelling Handbook* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming May 2023).

in their entirety. His translation of the first half of the Introduction appears in the present issue of *Symphilosophie*.

Another important gap in the English and French-speaking worlds, concerns the complete edition of Novalis's *Freiberger naturwissenschaftliche Studien* (1798 / 1799). Thanks to Fabrizio Desideri, a full translation of these studies on natural sciences already exists in Italian in the *Scritti filosofici* edition. Only a partial selection of these studies is available in English, in the Appendix to the *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*. A complete edition of the *Freiberger naturwissenschaftliche Studien* does not yet exist in French, but fortunately one is in the pipeline, and will appear as volume V of the *Œuvres philosophiques de Novalis*, translated by Olivier Schefer. With this multi-volume edition of the *Œuvres philosophiques de Novalis*, the translation of Novalis's philosophical works into French is also now practically complete. That said, the main bulk of Novalis's correspondence still remains to be translated in most languages. We hope to have shown here that his letters to Friedrich Schlegel alone prove this correspondence to be of considerable philosophical interest and significance. Thankfully, a French translation is also envisaged by Olivier Schefer, who has already translated a handful of the letters.³¹ Several of these letters are also available in English in the first 2019 issue of *Symphilosophie*.³² But the completion all these enormous research, editorial, and translation projects in different languages will surely require the fruit of a collective effort. That is to say, two hundred and fifty years after the births of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, the practice of symphilosophy still has a bright future.

³¹ "Six lettres de Novalis à Friedrich et August Wilhelm Schlegel", Novalis, *Semences*, 17-30.

³² "Twelve Letters from the Romantic Circle (1798-1799)", *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 167-190.

Book Reviews

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Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Gianluca Riccadonna, *Dante “poeta trascendentale”. L’idealismo tedesco e la Commedia*, Napoli, La Scuola di Pitagora, 2021, 136 pp. ISBN 978-88-6542-797-2.

Il testo di Riccadonna consegna al lettore uno spaccato, coerente e denso di dettagli, sulle vicende relative alla ricezione filosofica e letteraria del capolavoro dantesco nel contesto storico-culturale del romanticismo e idealismo tedeschi. Si tratta di un contributo da accogliere molto positivamente. Riccadonna dimostra una conoscenza approfondita delle vicissitudini teoriche relative alla collocazione della *Commedia* nello spazio aperto per essa dai *Frühromantiker*. A una precisa e sempre scorrevole ricostruzione della storia tedesca della *Commedia* a cavallo tra i secoli diciottesimo e diciannovesimo fa da contraltare un’attenta e organica disamina delle differenti reazioni che le terzine dantesche generarono e alimentarono nel costituirsi di quelle che potremmo definire le poetiche filosofiche dei protagonisti indiscussi di questo volume: i fratelli Schlegel, Schelling, Hegel.

Il volume è suddiviso in otto capitoli preceduti da un’introduzione. Si tratta di vere e proprie tappe di un percorso, e il lettore può senza dubbio beneficiare di un unico filo conduttore che attraversa ogni pagina: la *Commedia* come testo di riferimento e modello per i motivi filosofici fondamentali dei romantici e di alcune declinazioni dell’idealismo tedesco. Non è questa però una mera caratterizzazione in positivo, perché Riccadonna si preoccupa di discutere anche quelle reazioni per contrasto – quella di Hegel su tutte – che fanno indubbiamente parte della medesima vicenda. Entrambe le direzioni di questa analisi – l’accoglienza e la critica della *Commedia*, per così dire – si diramano comunque a partire dal medesimo centro teorico. La *Commedia* è l’immagine speculare, quasi la cifra più caratterizzante, dell’esigenza filosofica di colmare l’abisso – sentito prima ancora che teorizzato – tra le solide ma troppo astratte conquiste del sapere oggettivo e le più fluide e in un certo senso meno affidabili espressioni delle forme artistiche. La poesia dantesca infine, per aggiungere un ulteriore elemento, si dimostra capace non soltanto di presentare una qualche unità tra sapere e

sentire, ma anche di radicare questa unità nelle stesse coordinate storiche della sua genesi. Se la *Commedia* finisce per rappresentare agli occhi di romantici e idealisti una candidata di eccezionale valore al ruolo di opera universale, è esattamente in virtù dell'intrecciarsi e armonico combinarsi di queste tre tendenze. Riccadonna è abile nel ripresentare questo cardine lungo l'arco dell'intero volume senza mai risultare ripetitivo. Mostrandone le differenti sfaccettature, il principio guida dell'intera indagine viene per così dire aggiornato e declinato rispetto ai vari interlocutori e ai diversi testi in esame.

Un ulteriore aspetto degno di nota rimanda alla questione della mitologia. La ricezione della *Commedia* procede in parallelo al definirsi di una nuova immagine positiva del mito. Non si tratta ovviamente di un caso, proprio in ragione dell'intreccio sopramenzionato tra sentire, sapere e storia. In questo caso l'opera dantesca non è però soltanto modello nei termini di un'esemplificazione prototipica, ma anche fonte e materia prima a partire dalla quale risulta possibile ripensare la mitologia: non più forma deficitaria di un sapere che dovrebbe invece liberarsi di tutto ciò che è lontano o altro dal vero, ma narrazione che accompagna questo sapere e ne restituisce gli elementi vitali. Si tratta di considerazioni del tutto consolidate nella letteratura sul tema. Riccadonna ha il merito di impiegarle con profitto per strutturare la cornice entro cui iscrivere la ricezione della *Commedia*: tanto nei termini di un modello che risponde a esigenze pregresse quanto nei termini di un contributo fecondo che alimenta nuove idee. La cornice in oggetto risulta pertanto coerente ed esaustiva.

Non si può infine prescindere dal rilevare come, accanto ai protagonisti attivi di questa ricostruzione, prendano parte alla vicenda figure come Platone e Spinoza. Di nuovo, si tratta di un'attenzione che contribuisce alla completezza del tutto. Il lettore ha così modo di tenere in vista tutti gli elementi necessari per comprendere il posizionamento della *Commedia* in uno spazio che la sua stessa ricezione contribuisce a definire. Il paragrafo che segue, tratto dal capitolo IV (dedicato a Spinoza), sintetizza in maniera estremamente efficace il punto sollevato da Riccadonna. Vale la pena riportarlo per intero:

La natura divinizzata di Spinoza rappresenta dunque il fondale da cui emerge qualunque *imaginatio*, analogamente a come è dal naturalismo greco che affiora l'armoniosa poesia di Omero (la sua mitologia) e dallo spiritualismo cristiano l'ordine del creato celebrato in versi da Dante, la cui eccezionale energia creativa – vero oggetto dell'*Entdeckung* dei romantici nella loro opera di *Aneignung* della *Commedia* – non potrebbe

ricevere riconoscimento più esplicito ed efficace dell'accostamento ai primi due. (p. 63).

Alla “natura spiritualizzata di Spinoza” fa da contraltare, nel capitolo V, l'esigenza di una “spiritualizzazione della natura” (p. 75), esigenza a sua volta mutuata dalle dottrine platoniche e neoplatoniche. Il *Timeo* di *Platone* si presta in particolar modo a letture che mettono in risalto la “*poiesis* della natura” (p. 77) e restituiscono un legame tra *poiesis* e *poema*. Tanto nel caso di Spinoza quanto in quello di Platone, i riferimenti di Riccadonna sono del tutto funzionali allo scopo generale della ricerca. La ricezione tedesca della *Commedia* è parte integrante dello sviluppo della filosofia romantica e di alcuni motivi dell'idealismo. Di entrambe le cose fanno indubbiamente parte la ripresa di Platone e il richiamo a Spinoza. Prescindere da questi ultimi significherebbe compromettere la tenuta del quadro che Riccadonna ambisce a definire. Viceversa, chiarire come arrivino a combinarsi dottrine apparentemente così lontane le une dalle altre permette di cogliere al meglio le componenti fondamentali della temperie filosofico-culturale di quegli anni.

Venendo ai testi più squisitamente *danteschi* – nei termini di testi più o meno direttamente riferibili alla vera e propria ricezione della *Commedia* – l'attenzione di Riccadonna si concentra principalmente sui seguenti titoli: A. W. Schlegel, *Dante. Über die Göttliche Komödie* (1791); F. Schlegel, *Rede über die Mythologie* (all'interno del *Gespräch über die Poesie*, in «Athenaeum» 1798-1800); F. W. J. Schelling, *Über Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* (1803); F. W. J. Schelling, *Anhang (contra Bouterwerk*, in «Kritisches Journal der Philosophie» 1802-1803); F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802-1805); G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (1818-1828/1829). Una menzione a parte merita il frammento G. W. F. Hegel (?), F. W. J. Schelling (?), F. Hölderlin (?), *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (1796/1797?), dal momento che viene costantemente impiegato da Riccadonna quasi al modo di una cartina tornasole rispetto allo svolgersi della vicenda della ricezione della *Commedia*. Da un lato il frammento conferma gli stessi elementi propri della *Commedia* come modello di poesia filosofica, su tutti la sintesi tra sentire e sapere. Dall'altro, soprattutto in rapporto alle considerazioni dantesche di Hegel, il frammento lavora per contrasto, mostrando come la ricezione della *Commedia* non sia un processo lineare e come il capolavoro dantesco sia stato anche oggetto di considerazioni critiche. In entrambi i casi, in positivo e in negativo, al lettore viene comunque restituita l'immagine della *Commedia* come cifra esemplare di un'epoca e di una temperie filosofica.

Se il testo di A. W. Schlegel insiste sulla necessità interpretativa di leggere la *Commedia* a partire dal suo proprio tempo, sull'armonia figurale tra sentire e sapere e sulla dimensione politica dell'opera dantesca, le considerazioni di F. Schlegel fanno d'apripista a quelle di Schelling in rapporto alla dimensione mitologica del poema. È bene sottolineare come quest'ultima si definisca parallelamente al primato dell'arte come indiscusso organo della filosofia e alla *Naturphilosophie* dello stesso Schelling (p. 85). Il centro nevralgico su cui convergono queste tre istanze è per nulla casualmente "l'organicità della *Commedia*", che Riccadonna intende secondo due declinazioni complementari. Da un lato nei termini del luogo in cui si fondono "il genere drammatico, il romanzo, l'epica e il poema didascalico"; dall'altro al modo di una congiunzione "degli elementi religiosi, scientifici e poetici più rappresentativi dell'epoca" (p. 93).

Replicando a Bouterwerk, che nella sua *Geschichte der Italienischen Poesie und der Beredsamkeit* (1801) aveva criticato aspramente la *Commedia* per una certa farraginoso pedanteria, Schelling cerca di mostrare come – così Riccadonna – "l'astronomia, la teologia e la filosofia scolastiche" costituissero "la *necessaria materia* del capolavoro di Dante, espressione dell'identità dell'intera epoca del poeta a cui questi aveva genialmente e liberamente conferito la migliore *forma* poetica" (p. 96). Disporre di questa dialettica interpretativa – ricostruita da Riccadonna con chiarezza e precisione – permette al lettore di acquisire la massima familiarità con la ragione di fondo della ricerca qui in esame, vale a dire lo sforzo teso a definire il quadro generale entro cui si è svolta la vicenda della ricezione filosofica della *Commedia*.

L'ultimo interlocutore a questo proposito è Hegel. È interessante notare come il capitolo VII (seguito dal capitolo VIII, dedicato agli stessi temi) si sviluppi secondo un parallelismo tra la tesi hegeliana della *morte dell'arte* e una certa visione critica – sempre di stampo hegeliano – della *Commedia*. In un certo qual modo, si potrebbe osservare che questo parallelismo confermi – anziché inficiare – il ruolo della *Commedia* per il romanticismo e l'idealismo tedeschi. Nella stessa misura in cui l'opera dantesca risponde a una nuova concezione dell'arte e più in generale dell'unità tra sapere e sentire, la questione di una eventuale fine dell'arte non può non intaccare l'opera incaricata di esemplificarne le istanze. Se la fine dell'arte finisce col sovrapporsi alle considerazioni hegeliane sui limiti della *Commedia*, allora – seppure per contrasto rispetto alle posizioni più entusiastiche degli Schlegel e di Schelling – si può pur sempre ribadire il carattere prototipico della *Commedia* stessa. La differenza sostanziale tra le posizioni in gioco – così Riccadonna –

non pare tanto fondata sul maggiore allegorismo di Hegel, quanto piuttosto sulla svalutazione dell'arte rispetto alla religione e alla filosofia che, tra i vari effetti, consegue anche quello, inevitabile, di ridimensionare drasticamente lo status di esperienza spirituale *assoluta* da Schelling e dai romantici attribuito alla *Commedia* e, più in generale, alla *Poesie*. (p. 118)

Si chiude così con Hegel l'arco della ricerca di Riccadonna. L'autore mantiene la promessa di consegnare al lettore una ricostruzione organica e dettagliata della vicenda della ricezione della *Commedia*: i vari fili – tematici, interpretativi, testuali – restano sempre annodati al principio guida che vede l'opera dantesca quasi al modo di un'incarnazione di una visione poetica del mondo che segue le sorti del suo modello.

Questo non significa tuttavia esaurire le aspettative del lettore. Da un testo intitolato *Dante "poeta trascendentale"* ci si potrebbe pur sempre legittimamente attendere una maggiore discussione più genuinamente teoretico-filosofica della poetica dantesca, nello specifico di quelle posizioni dottrinali, epistemiche, religiose ed estetiche assunte ed esposte dai personaggi danteschi. Questa osservazione vale al modo di un invito ad approfondire in altri studi – vista la dettagliata conoscenza e ricostruzione della cornice – i contenuti del quadro medesimo. Il tema della poesia trascendentale, accanto a una disamina più prettamente filosofica dei temi della *Commedia*, rimane fin troppo sullo sfondo. Analogamente, nel contesto di uno studio incentrato sull'unità tra sapere e sentire e sul ruolo privilegiato dell'arte, si potrebbe senza dubbio porre la questione di un Dante filosofo – laddove questa veste rappresenterebbe più una declinazione del Dante poeta che un'alternativa a essa. Infine, un'ulteriore suggestione potrebbe essere quella di operare un confronto tra i temi poetico-filosofici danteschi e quelli più genuinamente romantici e idealisti al fine di mostrare assonanze e dissonanze ed eventualmente contestualizzare entrambe rispetto alla distanza – cronologica e culturale – che separa i due fronti.

Tanto in ragione delle conquiste che consegue quanto in virtù di ulteriori e potenziali sviluppi – da parte di Riccadonna medesimo o per iniziativa di altri studiosi – *Dante "poeta trascendentale"* è un testo fruttuoso che arricchisce il lettore. Lo stile espositivo è elegante senza mai risultare aggrovigliato o contorto, e il percorso proposto al lettore si snoda agilmente tra testi, autori e temi diversi senza mai perdere di vista la destinazione finale. Chiunque sia interessato a Dante o alla filosofia romantica e del primo idealismo troverà in questo studio una fonte affidabile di informazioni e una vivace e sempre coerente resa delle interazioni – storiche e teoriche – tra idee e visioni del mondo apparentemente molto lontane le une dalle altre. Lo

sforzo profuso nel colmare o dissolvere questa distanza apparente è senz'altro uno dei meriti principali del testo di Riccadonna.

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Stefan Matuschek, *Der gedichtete Himmel. Eine Geschichte der Romantik*, München, C. H. Beck, 2021, 400 S. ISBN 978-3-406-76693-0.

Das Interesse an der Romantik reißt nicht ab. Sieht man von der unübersehbaren Fülle an Einzeluntersuchungen ab, sind allein in Deutschland in den letzten vier Jahren vier Publikationen erschienen, die sich der Epoche widmen. Von diesen beschränkt sich allein Helmut Schanze ausschließlich auf die deutsche Romantik.¹ Auch Dirk von Petersdorff richtet sein Augenmerk in erster Linie auf die Entwicklung in Deutschland; er versucht aber darüber hinaus der „internationale[n] Geschichte der Romantik“ gerecht zu werden, indem er Beispiele aus der englischen, französischen und italienischen Romantik vergleichend heranzieht.² Für Rüdiger Görner und Stefan Matuschek hingegen kann es eine Geschichte der Romantik aus nationaler Perspektive im Grunde nicht geben.³ Die Auswirkungen der entscheidenden historischen Ereignisse, die Diskurse, die personalen Beziehungsgeflechte – sie alle machten, so das Argument, weder vor den Landes- noch den Sprachgrenzen Halt. Zu ausgeprägt seien die wechselseitigen Abhängigkeiten und Einflussnahmen, um eine ‚deutsche‘ Romantik sauber aus ihnen herauslösen zu können. Die Romantik sei ein „europäisches Ereignis“ (Görner) bzw. der – nach der Aufklärung – „zweite entscheidende Impuls der europäischen Moderne“.⁴

Die Europäisierung der Romantik ist allein deshalb ein zu begrüßendes Unternehmen, weil es aufgrund der mit ihm verbundenen Schwierigkeiten nicht allzu oft gewagt wurde.⁵ Bereits die deutsche Romantik ist ein so

¹ *Erfindung der Romantik*. Stuttgart 2018.

² *Romantik. Eine Einführung*. Frankfurt a. M. 2020, S. 10.

³ Görner: *Romantik. Ein europäisches Ereignis*. Ditzingen 2021.

⁴ Matuschek: *Der gedichtete Himmel. Eine Geschichte der Romantik*. München 2021, S. 30. Im Folgenden werden Zitate mit Seitenzahlen im Text nachgewiesen.

⁵ In den letzten Jahren scheint hier allerdings eine Neuorientierung stattgefunden zu haben. Vgl. Theodore Ziolkowski: *Stages of European Romanticism. Cultural Synchronicity across the Arts, 1798-1848*. Rochester, New York 2018. Warren Breckman: *European Romanticism. A Brief History with Documents*. Indianapolis, Ind. 2015. Helmut Hühn, Joachim Schiedermaier (Hg.): *Europäische Romantik. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven der Forschung*. Berlin 2015.

vielgestaltiges, in sich heterogenes Phänomen, dass es in allen seinen Ausformungen und Auswüchsen kaum zu fassen ist. Mit der Ausweitung der Perspektive vermehrt sich der einzubeziehende Stoff ins beinahe nicht mehr Beherrschbare. Es erfordert vielleicht ein langes Gelehrtenleben, gepaart mit einer hohen Sprachkompetenz in den verschiedenen europäischen Sprachen, um eine solche Fülle des Materials zu meistern. In diesem Sinne legt Stefan Matuschek mit *Der gedichtete Himmel* die beeindruckende Summe seines bisherigen Schaffens vor. Zugleich wirft die Ausweitung der Perspektive ein methodisches Problem auf. Die Masse an Stoff ist nicht nur zu beherrschen; sie ist auch zu organisieren, und zwar so, dass der zwangsläufig sich ergebende Verlust an Tiefenschärfe wirklich durch einen Gewinn an Übersicht kompensiert wird. Die Frage stellt sich also, auf der Grundlage welcher Kriterien das Geschichtspanorama entworfen wird, das an die Stelle der Detailkenntnis tritt und statt ihrer die großen Linien, die raumumspannenden Konstellationen und die topografische Verteilung der Ereignisse sichtbar machen soll.

Stefan Matuschek beschränkt sich, wie der Titel seiner Darstellung bereits andeutet, auf die romantische Dichtung bzw. Literatur. Diese Entscheidung hat den Vorteil, dass sie die meisten anderen Aspekte der Romantik miteinschließt. Denn die Literatur – und nicht nur die romantische – ist gleichsam der Spiegel, der das Bild der Welt gebrochen zurückwirft. Es lässt sich über sie gar nicht sprechen, ohne dass ihre Wechselwirkung mit der Politik, den Naturwissenschaften, der Philosophie, oder den anderen Künsten mitbedacht würde. Die Beschränkung auf die Literatur erlaubt es also auf gewisse Weise, doch die ganze Romantik zu behandeln, nämlich so, wie sie in der Vermittlung durch dieses Medium erscheint.

Überdies gewinnt der Autor aus seiner Entscheidung ein Argument, dass seinen komparatistischen Ansatz stärkt. Gerade auf dem Feld der Literatur, heißt es, sei die „nationale Begrenzung“, die etwa die Universitäten mit ihrer Einteilung der Literaturwissenschaft in Germanistik, Anglistik, Romanistik usw. vornehmen würden, der Sache nach nicht zu rechtfertigen: „Die Differenzen und Gemeinsamkeiten innerhalb der europäischen Literatur liegen quer zu den Sprach- und Nationalgrenzen. Schon die Gattungen sind eine wichtigere Einheit als die Sprachen“ (274). Zu dem Bild der Welt, das die Literatur reflektiert, gehört demnach auch ihre Wechselwirkung mit anderen, transnationalen Literaturen.

Es gibt aber noch einen weiteren Grund, weshalb Stefan Matuschek der Literatur eine besondere Bedeutung beimisst. In ihr ereignet sich seiner Auffassung zufolge das „epochal Neue“ (72) der Romantik. Mit ihrer

Dichtung hätten die Romantiker eine innovatorische Leistung vollbracht, die es – allen gängigen Vorurteilen zum Trotz – gestatte, die „Romantik als Fortschritt zu begreifen“ (10). Gemeint ist ein „neues Darstellungs- und Deutungsmodell von Transzendenz“ (354), das der Autor als ‚Kippfigur‘ bezeichnet. Mit der Kippfigur glaubt er, ein Merkmal gefunden zu haben, das die Dichtung der europäischen Romantik insgesamt auszeichnet (72).⁶ Als solches gibt es, wenn schon nicht der Romantik selbst – der Autor warnt davor, die Kippfigur als „Generalschlüssel“ (85) zur Romantik misszuverstehen –, so doch der Geschichte, die von ihr erzählt wird, eine Einheit.

Was versteht Matuschek unter der Kippfigur und worin genau besteht ihre Leistung? Die Kippfigur ist dem Bereich des Visuellen entnommen: „Kippfiguren sind Abbildungen, die zugleich ganz Verschiedenes zeigen und es in der Interpretation des Betrachters hin und her springen, kippen lassen“ (67). Es handelt sich um ein Phänomen sogenannter multistabiler Wahrnehmung, d. h. ein visueller Reiz lässt mehr als eine Deutung zu. Der Begriff ‚Deutung‘ oder ‚Interpretation‘ führt hier allerdings etwas in die Irre. Das Kippen der Wahrnehmung ist willentlich nicht vermeidbar. Die Unbestimmtheit, die den Spielraum der Interpretation allererst definiert, besteht im Fall der Kippfigur lediglich in dem ‚Zugleich‘ beider Wahrnehmungsoptionen. Die Kippfigur verhindert die Priorisierung einer der beiden Wahrnehmungen. Die Doppeldeutigkeit ist unaufhebbar. Der Verstand hat sich mit dem Weder-Noch-Charakter des Phänomens zu arrangieren.

Diesen Charakter eines Weder-Noch entdeckt der Autor auch in den Texten der Romantik.⁷ Ob dies Eichendorffs *Mondnacht* ist, in dem vor allem die dritte Strophe Transzendenz verheiße, dabei aber offen lasse, ob diese Verheißung als „mythische Vorstellung“, „sentimentale Metapher“ oder „christliche[r] Jenseitsglaube“ (14) zu lesen sei;⁸ oder der berühmte Blaue Blume-Traum am Anfang von Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, in dem unentschieden bleibe, ob es sich um eine „göttliche Weisung“ oder eine „erotische Jungenfantasie“ (71) handelt; oder Leopardis *L’infinito* (72f.),

⁶ Das unterscheidet die Kippfigur von anderen innovatorischen Leistungen „bestimmter Gruppen oder Individuen“ (275). So blieb der bedeutende Beitrag der deutschen Frühromantik zur Philosophie oder Ästhetik in der Zeit seiner Entstehung weitgehend auf den deutschen Sprachraum beschränkt und auch dort eher unbeachtet.

⁷ Von Interesse wären hier einige Überlegungen zu der Frage gewesen, inwiefern sich ein Wahrnehmungsmuster aus dem Bereich des Visuellen überhaupt auf Texte übertragen lässt. Die zu unterstellende Differenz zwischen Optik und Semantik bleibt jedoch gänzlich undiskutiert. Aus diesem Grund eignet sich die Kippfigur auch nicht als Begriff, allenfalls als Metapher oder Analogie.

⁸ Dirk von Petersdorff: *Romantik*, S. 32, widmet dem Gedicht ganz ähnliche Überlegungen.

Foscolos *Dei sepolcri* (79f.), Schillers *Jungfrau von Orleans* (110-112), Wordsworths *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* (217-219) – überall findet Matuschek dasselbe Muster: die Romantik lässt, nach dem Durchgang der Religion durch Bibel- und Vernunftkritik, das Transzendente weiterhin zu, ohne sich damit allerdings auf eine bestimmte Position festzulegen. Der ontologische Status des Transzendenten bleibt offen. Ist es Einbildung oder Wirklichkeit? Ist es Gott, Geist oder Natur? Die Entscheidung wird dem Leser anheimgestellt.

Es ist die große Stärke der Kippfigur, dass sich in ihr strukturelle und inhaltliche Eigenschaften durchdringen.⁹ Sie ist Strukturmerkmal literarischer Texte, und zwar auch dann, wenn diese – wie im Falle Leopardis – den erklärten Absichten des Autors oder – wie im Falle Foscolos – der Form nach nicht ohne weiteres als ‚romantisch‘ klassifiziert werden können. Als ein solches Merkmal ist die Kippfigur aber zugleich eingebettet in einen nationenübergreifenden historischen Prozess, für den die Bezeichnung ‚Säkularisierung‘ gebräuchlich geworden ist. Vor dem Hintergrund dieses alle Bereiche des menschlichen Lebens allmählich transformierenden Vorgangs erhält die Kippfigur ihre Bedeutung und ihre Funktion. Sie ist, wie Matuschek schreibt, „Darstellungs- und Deutungsmodell“ in einem. Als Deutungsmodell bringt sie die fundamentale Opposition gegen das Bestreben zum Ausdruck, alles dasjenige, was sich jenseits der Grenzen der Vernunft befindet, vom Denken auszuschließen. Als Darstellungsmodell gehört die Kippfigur zu den von Matuschek so genannten „Strategien der Offenheit“ (183). Diese Strategien haben den Zweck, das Ziehen fester Grenzen zu verhindern oder zumindest zu verunsichern. Sie dienen einer Erweiterung der Möglichkeiten ins Unendliche. Möglich wird nun, das Jenseits nicht mehr nur zu denken. Das tun die Romantiker auch, und zwar auf höchst spekulative Weise. Aber sie erproben auch andere Zugänge: solche affektiver, sensorischer, psychophysischer und vor allem – ästhetischer Art. Für diese Experimente ist die Literatur das Laboratorium und die Bühne zugleich.¹⁰

⁹ Diese Stärke lässt darüber hinwegsehen, dass die Deutung einzelner Texte bzw. Textpassagen im Sinne der Kippfigur nicht immer zu überzeugen vermag.

¹⁰ Als Bühne nutzen die Romantiker die Literatur nicht zuletzt, um ihr Programm voranzutreiben. In diesem Sinne ist die Romantik zugleich Produkt und Katalysator jenes Strukturwandels der Öffentlichkeit, der durch die industrielle Buchproduktion, das Zeitungswesen, das Verblässen der Gelehrtenkultur und die gleichzeitige Ausweitung des Lesepublikums die Bedingungen ihrer Möglichkeit erst schafft. Über die von Stefan Matuschek gegebenen Hinweise hinaus ist in diesem Zusammenhang Helmut Schanzes *Erfindung der Romantik* maßgeblich.

Von hier aus gelingt es dem Autor, weitere Aspekte der Romantik und insbesondere der romantischen Literatur kurzzuschließen. So deutet er auch das romantische Interesse am Fantastischen und Schauerlichen als eine Weise des Umgangs mit dem Transzendenten, nämlich dergestalt, dass es „das Wunderbare und Übernatürliche, wie es im traditionellen Glauben oder auch Aberglauben überliefert ist, auf ganz neue Weise als Ausdrucksmittel realer menschlicher Psychologie“ (219) verwende. Aber des Fantastische bleibt eine Kippfigur: „In ihr ist die Transzendenz keine Gewissheit, sondern eine Deutungsmöglichkeit“ (218). Ähnlich wird die romantische Ironie interpretiert. Die ironische Redeweise formuliere das Absolute und widerrufe es zugleich. Das mache sie zu „eine[r] eigene[n] Variante der Kippfigur“ (198).

Die Bemühungen um eine ‚neue‘ oder zumindest ‚eigene‘ Mythologie und die damit verbundene Renationalisierung der Kultur stellen sich Matuschek ebenfalls als eine spezifische Ausprägung des romantischen Verhältnisses zum Transzendenten dar. Dieses Verhältnis allerdings kann sich nun nicht mehr in Kippfiguren äußern. Der in den Dienst des Patriotismus gestellten Literatur ist Offenheit oder Ironie genauso fremd wie dem katholischen Glaubensbekenntnis, das mit dem Fortgang des 19. Jahrhunderts immer mehr Romantiker ablegten. Die Romantik erscheint nun selbst als Kippfigur. Indem sie vergisst, dass der Himmel, den sie beschwört, nur gedichtet sein könnte, kippt sie in ihr eigenes Gegenteil. So konnte die Romantik, die Germaine de Staël in ihrem Buch *De l'Allemagne* (1813) noch als Avantgarde der Philosophie und Literatur gepriesen hatte, bereits zweiundzwanzig Jahre später von Heinrich Heine in *Die romantische Schule* als reaktionärer Katholizismus verspottet werden. Es ist nicht das geringste Verdienst von Stefan Matuschek, dass er dem heutigen – auch von Heine verschuldeten – „Klischeebild“ (43) der Romantik ein Panorama von europäischem Maßstab entgegenhält, welches ermessen lässt, was die Moderne ihr zu verdanken hat.

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Clément Layet, Hölderlin. La démesure et le vivant, Paris, Vrin, 2020, 380 p. ISBN 978-2-7116-2976-3.

Bien qu'il n'ait jamais appartenu, de près ou de loin, au mouvement romantique, quelque définition que l'on en donne, Hölderlin a au moins deux traits communs avec les premiers romantiques d'Iéna : il partage avec eux un certain nombre de références culturelles et intellectuelles qui structurent le cadre dialogique dans lequel se déploie sa pensée (la nécessité de se débattre avec la présence écrasante de Goethe, l'importance centrale de Kant, le dialogue avec Fichte...) ; et son œuvre présente une intrication extrêmement subtile entre recherche théorique et production littéraire. Sur ces deux points, la monographie consacrée par Clément Layet au parcours intellectuel de Hölderlin pourra alimenter les réflexions des spécialistes du romantisme allemand.

Cet ouvrage, issu d'une thèse soutenue en 2013 à l'Université de Clermont-Ferrand, se présente comme l'ouvrage peut-être le plus ample, le plus médité et le plus précis jamais consacré à Hölderlin en français. À ce titre, il vient combler un manque important dans les études hölderliniennes françaises (si tant est qu'une telle chose existe) : malgré des contributions majeures, comme le volume de la Pléiade dirigé par Philippe Jaccottet, les articles et éditions de Jean-François Courtine (auquel on doit également un important *Cahier de l'Herne*), les publications de Françoise Dastur ou encore les interventions iconoclastes de Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, il manquait un volume de référence, qui tente de proposer une reconstruction complète de la pensée hölderlinienne en tenant compte de ses caractéristiques propres. C'est désormais chose faite grâce à cet ouvrage difficile, parfois secret et peut-être trop replié sur sa propre plongée dans les profondeurs de la pensée hölderlinienne, mais d'une richesse, d'une puissance analytique et d'une ampleur d'autant plus impressionnantes qu'elles s'accompagnent de prudence et de minutie.

On peut regretter que le plan de l'ouvrage ne soit pas plus explicite : non seulement les titres énigmatiques des chapitres nous en apprennent peu sur leur contenu, mais l'introduction ne dit rien sur le principe organisateur de la démonstration. À la lecture, on comprend assez vite que le plan est, dans l'ensemble, chronologique : après une introduction qui situe Hölderlin dans le contexte de l'onde de choc provoquée par la publication des *Critiques* de Kant et met ainsi en place les coordonnées dans lesquelles va se déployer sa pensée, les chapitres reconstituent patiemment son itinéraire intellectuel en prenant pour point de départ l'essai fragmentaire intitulé *Über Religion*, dans lequel l'auteur voit la première formulation aboutie de ce que Hölderlin

recherche depuis le début des années 1790. C'est le commentaire des principaux textes, aussi bien poétiques (traductions du grec comprises) que philosophiques, qui rythme la progression de l'ouvrage. Des retours en arrière et des anticipations ponctuelles permettent de replacer chaque texte au sein du développement de la pensée hölderlinienne, ce qui donne parfois l'occasion à l'auteur d'esquisser des mises en perspectives d'une puissance de synthèse assez remarquable : mentionnons à cet égard les brillants aperçus sur la genèse des thèses formulées dans l'essai *Über die Verfahrensweise des poetischen Geistes* que l'on trouve dans le chapitre « Décision » (p. 151 sq.). La thèse qui donne son fil directeur à la reconstruction proposée est double : il s'agit, premièrement, de soutenir que toute la pensée de Hölderlin est sustentée par la recherche d'un dépassement des dualismes traditionnels (sensible / intelligible, entendement / sensibilité, nature / esprit, idéalisme / réalisme, etc.) qui ne les annule pas, mais montre comment les termes qui les composent se différencient et s'articulent ; et, deuxièmement, de faire l'hypothèse que le principe de la solution à ce problème se trouve dans une pensée relationnelle déployée autour du concept de « l'Un différencié en soi-même » (p. 35). Faire de la *relation* le fil rouge des travaux philosophiques, poétiques et religieux de Hölderlin permet d'en faire apparaître la cohérence de manière extrêmement éclairante, et d'en marquer la différence, comme l'auteur ne manque pas de le faire, avec les constructions de Fichte ou Hegel : la facilité avec laquelle l'auteur semble triompher de toutes les pires difficultés du commentaire hölderlinien (un exemple au hasard : comment faire sens de textes à la complexité aussi décourageante qu'*Über die Verfahrensweise des poetischen Geistes* ou les *Anmerkungen* sur Sophocle ?) atteste assez de la pertinence de la perspective adoptée. Cette interprétation de Hölderlin, bien qu'elle puisse évidemment être discutée, ne manquera pas de s'imposer comme une référence et de susciter de nouvelles discussions. Parmi les points les plus remarquables de l'ouvrage, on peut mentionner le changement de perspective qu'il introduit par rapport aux interprétations centrées sur le fragment *Urtheil und Seyn* (qui, s'il est dûment commenté aux p. 25-30, n'est pas au cœur de la démonstration), sa reconstruction du concept de « sensation transcendante » (p. 161 sq.), la manière dont il montre comment la nécessité de la langue poétique et les particularités stylistiques des derniers hymnes se fondent dans les réflexions de Hölderlin sur l'Un et l'image (p. 167 sq.), ses brillants développements sur le divin, le sens du mot « dieu » et le rapport de Hölderlin à la religion en général, et au christianisme en particulier (par exemple aux p. 189 sq.), ses commentaires à la fois sobres et précis des textes sur Sophocle, ou encore son approche originale des thèmes de la nature et du vivant.

Mais le point le plus remarquable de l'ouvrage est peut-être, plus encore que la pertinence de l'interprétation qu'il développe, la manière dont la démonstration est menée. L'auteur est en effet parvenu à élaborer une sorte de méthode *ad hoc* pour articuler, sans jamais les dissocier mais tout en respectant leurs particularités génériques, les différentes dimensions dont l'association fait la singularité de l'œuvre hölderlinienne, à savoir la poésie, la philosophie et la réflexion religieuse. À cet égard, l'auteur passe avec une aisance impressionnante du commentaire conceptuel et argumentatif des textes philosophiques à l'étude littéraire des poèmes ; mais surtout, il s'efforce toujours de créer des ponts entre ces différents types d'analyse et de les entrecroiser, comme en témoigne par exemple l'excellent commentaire inaugural du poème « Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter », dans lequel une étude littéraire attentive à la forme et la composition fait émerger une articulation thématique qui sera reprise, sous sa forme purement conceptuelle, dans le commentaire du fragment *Über Religion*. De nombreux développements se signalent par un remarquable souci de précision conceptuelle et une extrême attention aux fluctuations de la terminologie hölderlinienne, tant pour y repérer des continuités souterraines que pour restituer la singularité des textes étudiés. Quant aux analyses des poèmes, elles ne tombent pas dans l'écueil classique des lectures supposément « philosophiques » consistant à en donner une lecture simplement thématique qui, en fait d'analyse, se contente de gloser sur quelques mots-clés et formules frappantes : tout au contraire, leur dimension proprement littéraire (forme, composition, syntaxe, versification, etc.) est toujours prise en vue. On sera également sensible au caractère très réfléchi des traductions proposées, qui bénéficient de l'expérience de l'auteur dans la traduction des poèmes de Hölderlin (il en a déjà publié un recueil aux éditions William Blake & Co. en 2014).

Le livre de Clément Layet n'est certes pas exempt de tout reproche : la table des matières énigmatique (conjuguée à l'absence d'*index rerum*) rend difficile la circulation dans l'ouvrage, la densité constante de l'écriture ne facilite pas toujours la lecture, la dimension politique de l'itinéraire hölderlinien est à peine évoquée et une bonne partie des passages sur Heidegger (malheureusement inévitables dans un livre français sur Hölderlin), bien qu'ils aient au moins le mérite de souligner les limites de l'interprétation heideggerienne sur la question du divin, aurait pu être éliminée sans dommage. Plus grave, la littérature secondaire est évoquée avec une étonnante parcimonie et n'est jamais directement discutée, alors que l'originalité de certaines interprétations avancées aurait nécessité qu'elles soient confrontées à celles des prédécesseurs de l'auteur – entendons, ceux

qui ne s'appellent pas Heidegger. À cet égard, on s'étonne par exemple qu'un des fleurons des études hölderliniennes, le commentaire d'*Urtheil und Seyn* publié par Dieter Henrich, ne soit jamais mentionné – signalons au passage que l'entrée « Dieter Henrich » de l'index est fautive : la mention indiquée (p. 123, n. 3) renvoie en fait à une occurrence du prénom d'Henrich Steffens. Mais, tout bien pesé, ce sont là peu de choses en comparaison du travail remarquable accompli dans cet ouvrage, qui nous semble appelé à devenir une référence majeure dans les études hölderliniennes de langue française.

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Dalia Nassar, Kristin Gjesdal (eds.), *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century: The German Tradition*, transl. by Anna C. Ezekiel, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, 327 pp. ISBN 978-0-190-86803-1.

Sometimes when I check my social media account, I see other academics asking for tips to expand our teaching canon – and most often, the respective replies reference this very volume: *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Even though just published, a lot of researchers and especially instructors are already putting it to good use, expanding our students' awareness of the rich history of philosophy that we for so long neglected to reflect on properly. Our forgetfulness is due mostly to the still formative work of late nineteenth century authors of the history of German literature and philosophy who intentionally excluded the contributions of women writers (most instructive on this exclusion is Ruth Whittle's study *Gender, Canon, and Literary History*, De Gruyter, 2013), but also the current, relentless streamlining of course design. Little do we remember that even before the nineteenth century, in the lifetime of Maria Sibylla Merian (1647-1717), women could not only get a decent education, but they could also become leaders in trade, silk production, or in other areas. Thus, not always and everywhere have women been strictly excluded from 'public life', and hence there is no reason why all of them should have been hiding in the long nineteenth century.

This present volume is the perfect handbook to expand the canon of any 19th and early 20th course on European philosophy in exactly this area. With the exception of Madame de Staël, it contains leading voices of German

and Austrian women intellectuals who made significant, albeit often overlooked, contributions to contemporaneous debates. And even if Madame de Staël's influence in France might also be notable, her works, in particular *On Germany*, left an impression on those she described as well. Given that she herself was an expatriate, she might have become something like a German by popular acclaim; ultimately, her perspective on Germany shows how sympathetic outsiders saw the famous land of poets and thinkers, and how these same poets and thinkers came to see themselves.

As the editors explain, the scope of the volume covers important fields in the history of philosophy that were particularly lively (and respectively contested) in their time: the philosophy of nature, of consciousness and embodiment, the philosophy of history, economics, aesthetics, and epistemology, all including the 'female' perspective on experience as such, and their experience as females within these fields. The true lineage that emerges with the thinkers in question is the one "from romanticism to phenomenology" (Introduction, p. 7). In particular, the presented texts are indeed revealed to be in communication with and a critique of those texts usually contained in nineteenth-century textbooks, such as those of Fichte, Schopenhauer, Marx, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche. Just take, for example, the inclusion of Karoline von Günderrode's commentary on Fichte's influential *The Vocation of Humankind* (1800), which gives the reader an instructive insight into the immediate effect of this late, and nearly last stage of a dominant debate in the eighteenth century. And Günderrode's text is one of lively affirmation instead of Lutheran groveling: "[N]ature spiritualizes itself before my gaze, it becomes related to me, it is, like me, an expression of that will, presented in another form. And so, to me, death itself is only a wrestling of the inner life to a better life. I am part of that spiritual life force; how could I die, who am myself life?" (p. 74)

What the texts of this volume show us is not only that the history of philosophy is far richer than the established canon (this might always be the impression if we add any texts to the canon), but also, that philosophy as construed by women intellectuals should not be conceived of as an intellectual exercise against life, but one within it (see, for instance, Introduction, p. 19). This is a continuation and deepening of eighteenth century *Popularphilosophie* at its best. Woman intellectuals had to explore and manifest their space. Due to a lack of possible academic positions, they wrote less for academia, but "developed a way of philosophizing that was more activist in spirit and geared toward communicating with ordinary people rather than university colleagues and students." (Introduction, p. 1) This also helps us to detect "unexpected points of continuity between" different

philosophical or literary movements that were rather seen as separate (Introduction, p. 6), and which come together, for instance, in Bettina Brentano von Arnim's work (who the editors rightly place within socialism and romanticism), or Gerda Walther's transition from studies in Marx to phenomenology.

In addition, these writings show "a distinctly transnational orientation and the forging of international networks" (Introduction, p. 9), reaching towards Russian literature, the international reception of Marxism, and ideas presented by Mill or Wollstonecraft, for instance.

In light of this it is quite jarring to see the difference between the writings by Günderrode and Brentano-von Arnim, which are indeed the fascinating midpoint between German Romanticism and *Vormärz*, and the other writings which all appeared after 1848. It might have been interesting to include some writings or letters by the *salonnières* (see intro to chapter 3), such as those of Rahel Varnhagen or Henriette Herz (for example, her exchange with Friedrich Schleiermacher).

The impact of the political events of the mid-century, and the subsequent Biedermeier period during the Restoration was apparently quite great. These might have been limiting for women's agency, but at the same time they offered the foundations for more activism and more opportunities, as we can see in the higher numbers of women educators throughout the second half of the century, and an increased activity in social justice movements. The implications of suppression, the issue of women's suffrage, and the social and political implications of Nietzsche and Marx were discussed and critiqued by Hedwig Dohm and Clara Zetkin. We get to know Dohm as one of the most important advocates for women's rights, and a firm adversary of biological essentialism, stating that being born a woman should not be the same as being effectively "stillborn" (p. 122). She also highlights the importance of self-transformation (and also, contra Nietzsche, the value of consistent argumentation). The image of the new mother / new daughter shows the transformation of our self-image as intellectuals and human beings within social contexts, and seeks to delineate a new conception of freedom and the self.

Clara Zetkin, public speaker, successful journal editor (p. 155), fighter for socialism and women's rights, *the* public face of the SAP, who promoted Socialism in Germany and Europe at large, gears this more towards the political sphere (and less toward the personal sphere as Dohm does). It is interesting here that the editors not only chose essays on women's rights, but also on race-relations in the US, to showcase that feminists did indeed think about other issues as well. Zetkin's intervention on behalf of the "Scottsboro

boys” (pp. 174-6) attests to the intensified unity of socialist movements in the fight against oppression. Unsurprisingly, Zetkin was also more sensitive than Dohm to socio-economic conditions and their influence on emancipatory efforts. Even more, Zetkin is highly conscious of the fact that the subjugation of the woman by her husband would only be replaced by the subjugation to the employer if emancipation did not go hand in hand with the emancipation of the worker (p. 157) – a historical consideration of the concept of right as pertaining to human beings as persons (and not as man, employer, or any other specific form; an interesting debate between her and Lily Braun, who supported the idea that women’s emancipation necessitates them to stand up against men, is hinted at on pages 160-1).

The inclusion of both Rosa Luxemburg and Gerda Walther completes the picture of the politically engaged practical philosopher, whereas Lou Andreas Salomé and Edith Stein, both in their own way, deepen aspects of self-knowledge, psychology, and phenomenology. It is the notion of embodiment (whether in its sexual expression, see Salomé, or in its situatedness in a world, see Stein) that plays an important role here and in this regard foreshadows some discussions of the late 20th century. I am particularly glad to see Salomé included in this volume, as this is one further step to get her out of the box as a mere “muse, mentor, and collector of male geniuses” (p. 177) – though many of her publications explicitly relate to these figures (p. 179 mentions a few). Her philosophical treatment of Nietzsche’s work opened up new hermeneutical paths to explore a complex philosophical perspective (p. 179), and it would indeed be an interesting contrast to read Dohm and Salomé together in a seminar on Nietzsche and the phenomenology of the self and the body.

This wonderful, fruitful, and comprehensive edition contains a very informative introduction by the editors, instructive comments on translation, a bibliography, and a helpful index. The translations for each author are preceded by informative introductions that not only reference the author’s life and works (with specific attention to the translated texts), but also their influence on male and female philosophers alike. This helps tremendously when fitting these women into the histories of philosophy we have been telling ourselves – and it also alters them considerably.

If there is one reason to complain – and it is indeed minor – it would be that the supposed “richness in style” (Introduction, pp. 13-15), which also contributed to the showcased authors’ exclusion from the usual manners of academic debate, is omitted here “mostly for pragmatic reasons” (Introduction, p. 15). This is understandable as this volume seeks to make available (and this includes: teachable at a beginner’s level) representative philo-

sophical texts by women philosophers. It is, at the same time, to be lamented that teaching these texts should bind us to the common style of philosophical argumentation, whereas the writing styles of these women are much more diverse and progressive. We do not limit ourselves to Nietzsche's "more philosophical" books (whichever those might be, maybe the *Genealogy of Morals*?), but digest the *Gay Science* and even *Zarathustra*. We can and should extend this courtesy to the present authors. For instance, Bettina Brentano-von Arnim's *This Book Belongs To The King* (1843) is a wonderful example of a non-traditional writing style in political philosophy, and it contains great tongue-in-cheek arguments for the improvement of statesmanship as well as arguments for public welfare and criminal law with respect to social circumstances. It would also be a more convincing testament of how Brentano-von Arnim's thought is independent of other historical figures, such as her friend Günderröde, whom she aspired to immortalize in her book *Die Günderröde* (1840).

In any event, we can say with this volume that the door is now open for an expansion of the canon stylistically as well.

Overall the translations by Anna C. Ezekiel are excellent; they are not littered with German phrases, but occasionally, the English translation is rather given in brackets for greater clarity or when a technical phrase is used (for instance, "woman *an sich* [in herself]", p. 135). Readability is superb throughout.

This volume will tremendously increase discussion of contributions to philosophy by women, of the role of women in the history of philosophy, psychology, art, and literature, and it will expand the range of "philosophical questions" (Introduction, pp. 6-7) in the process.

Even though I personally have started teaching again in a German-speaking country and do not seem to be in need of such a collection of translations, this edition will surely inspire the design of my future courses.

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Andrea Wulf, *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022). 512 pp. ISBN 978-0525657118.

Dies., *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich*, aus dem Engl. von Andreas Wirthensohn, München, C. Bertelsmann, 2022, 526 S. ISBN 978-3-570-10395-1.

Andrea Wulfs Buch *Fabelhafte Rebellen* ist ein Porträt des frühromantischen Kreises in Jena von 1794 bis 1806. Die Seiten des Buches sind mit einer großen Besetzung von Darstellern bzw. von *dramatis personae* gefüllt: Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Friedrich und August Wilhelm Schlegel, Friedrich Schiller, Ludwig Tieck, Caroline Böhmer, Alexander und Wilhelm von Humboldt, Novalis, Dorothea Veit und Goethe. Wulf erzählt so sorgfältig und anschaulich bis in die kleinsten Züge hinein von deren Ideen, Persönlichkeiten, Handlungen und Emotionen, dass die Geschilderten lebendig vor den Augen des Lesers dastehen. Es ist fast so, würde Wulf den zeitgenössischen Dorfklatsch bieten. Sie stellt die Ereignisse in einer peinlich genauen und spannenden Sprache dar, so dass der Leser unbedingt wissen will, wie es weitergeht. Wir haben es hier mit einem „Pageturner“ zu tun.

Mehrmals bezeichnet Wulf ihr Thema als „die Jenaer Romantiker“. Eine professionelle Kennerin der Materie würde jedoch mit Wulfs Besetzung und Datierung hadern. Sie würde uns sagen, dass die Frühromantik von 1797 bis 1802 dauerte, und dass Fichte, Hegel, Schiller und Goethe eigentlich gar keine Romantiker waren. Es ist kaum möglich Hegel, Schiller und Goethe zu den Romantikern zu zählen, würde die Kennerin sagen, da sie in der Tat Feinde derjenigen waren, die man im engeren Sinne „Romantiker“ nennt. Aber ein Streit über die Nomenklatur ist letztlich weder aufschlussreich noch interessant. Obwohl es in der Tat irreführend ist, alle Figuren Wulfs als „Romantiker“ zu bezeichnen, muss man allerdings zugeben: man könnte die Streitigkeiten zwischen diesen Gruppen nicht verstehen, ließe man sie nicht zusammen auf einer Bühne auftreten. Und mit diesem Szenenbild erfüllt Wulff immerhin eine Anforderung des Aristoteles an die Tragödie: die Einheit von Zeit und Ort.

Welcher literarischen Gattung lässt sich Wulfs Buch zuordnen? Im englischsprachigen Raum ist sie nicht so verbreitet, aber im deutschsprachigen Raum ist sie weitaus geläufiger: Man nennt sie „Kulturkitsch“, eine mindere Erscheinungsform der Geistesgeschichte. Kulturkitsch ist eine populäre Einführung in einen Kulturbereich, deren Anziehungskraft in der

vereinfachenden Darstellung des intellektuellen Gehalts und in Anekdoten aus dem persönlichen Leben ihrer Hauptakteure liegt. Gegen Kulturkitsch ist nichts einzuwenden, er kann als Einführung in einen Kulturbereich gute Dienste leisten; der Kulturkitsch verkommt aber, wenn er dabei grob vereinfachende, falsche oder irreführende Darstellungen intellektueller Gehalte liefert. Wulfs Buch verkommt auf all diese Weisen. Sie hat Mühe ein verbindendes Thema für alle ihre Autoren zu finden; aber „die Erfindung des Ich“ ist ein postmodernes Klischee, das auf die Romantiker nicht zutrifft. Wulfs große Stärke ist ihr erzählerisches Geschick; ihre große Schwäche ist jedoch die Philosophie, wo es ihr an den Grundlagen begrifflicher Strenge und Analyse mangelt.

Wulf beschreibt die Ideen und Anliegen der Frühromantiker als um die Philosophie Fichtes kreisend, insbesondere um seine Idee des Ich. Die „neue Betonung des Ich“, so Wulf, war das „Zentrum dieses romantischen Projekts“.¹ Was die Romantiker an Fichtes Ich begeisterte, so erfahren wir, war „die aufregendst[e] aller Ideen [...]: de[r] frei[e] Wille“.² Dieser Idee eines freien Willens stellt sie den Determinismus gegenüber, die These, dass der Mensch „ein Rädchen in einer scheinbar gottgegebenen Maschine“ bleibe.³ Weiter geht Wulf bei der Beschreibung der Freiheitsidee der Frühromantiker nicht. Aber ist sie weit genug gegangen?

Die Idee des freien Willens war 1789 bereits Jahrhunderte alt – ihre Ursprünge gehen auf Aristoteles oder Augustinus zurück – und Fichte hatte nie behauptet, sie entdeckt zu haben. Wulf verwechselt schlicht die Idee des freien Willens mit Fichtes charakteristischem Begriff der absoluten Unabhängigkeit, den er in seiner *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) und in seiner *Sittenlehre* (1798) als vollständige Selbstbestimmung, als Abwesenheit von Bestimmung durch äußere Ursachen beschreibt. Die Idee des freien Willens besteht darin, dass das Ich das Vermögen hat, entweder X oder nicht X zu tun, und dass jede der beiden Handlungen mit seiner Persönlichkeit und seiner Erziehung vereinbar ist. Der Begriff der absoluten Unabhängigkeit besagt, dass das Selbst nur das ist, was es aus sich selbst macht, dass sein Wesen oder seine Natur nicht von irgendetwas außerhalb seiner selbst abhängt, um das zu sein, was es ist. Die Idee des freien Willens ist bescheidener als der Begriff der absoluten Unabhängigkeit: Sie befreit das Selbst von der Abhängigkeit von äußeren Ursachen nur in Bezug auf seine Entscheidungen; sie befreit das Selbst nicht in seinem gesamten Wesen von

¹ Andrea Wulf, *Fabelhafte Rebellen: Die frühen Romantiker und die Erfindung des Ich*. München 2022, S. 36. Vgl. *Magnificent Rebels* (eBook), 72.

² *Fabelhafte Rebellen*, S. 29. Vgl. *Magnificent Rebels*, 53.

³ Ebd. Vgl. *Magnificent Rebels*, 54.

äußeren Ursachen. Mit einer solch dürftigen und ungenauen Lesart des Fichteschen Freiheitsbegriffs hat Wulf ihrer Untersuchung einen schlechten Start verschafft.

Wulfs weitere Darstellung der Philosophie Fichtes ist noch verworrenere. Sie sagt uns, dass Fichtes Ich „ursprünglich schlechthin sein eignes Seyn [setzt]“ und dass durch „diesen anfänglichen Akt [...] das ‚Nicht-Ich‘ – die äußere Welt, zu der die Natur, die Tiere, die anderen Menschen und so weiter gehörten“ entstehe.⁴ Dies scheint die populäre Interpretation von Fichtes Ich zu sein, nach der das Ich das Nicht-Ich oder die ganze Welt durch seine eigene Selbstsetzung erschafft. Aber Wulf warnt uns klugerweise vor dieser Lesart.

Fichte meint nicht, „dass das Ich die Welt als solche erschafft“, schreibt sie, sondern er meint nur, dass das Ich „unser *Wissen* über die Welt erschafft“; „Einfach ausgedrückt: Die Welt ist so, wie wir *denken*, dass sie ist, und deshalb lässt sie sich erkennen, anders als Kants Ding-an-sich“ (*ebd.*). Aber wenn das alles ist, was Fichte meint, dann ist sein Ideal der absoluten Unabhängigkeit nicht realisierbar, denn die Welt wird immer noch außerhalb von uns existieren, natürlich nicht als Ding an sich, aber zumindest als ein erkennbares Objekt, das das Ich begrenzen und beeinflussen kann. Dies ist eher ein Problem für Wulf als für Fichte. Denn Fichte bringt sein Ideal der absoluten Unabhängigkeit mit der Existenz einer Außenwelt in Einklang, indem er die absolute Unabhängigkeit zu einem regulativen Ideal macht, einem Ideal, das wir nie erreichen können, das wir aber durch ein unendliches Streben nach Beherrschung und Unterwerfung der Natur zu verwirklichen versuchen. Dieser Begriff des unendlichen Strebens war wirklich das Herz und die Seele von Fichtes früher Wissenschaftslehre. Wulf erwähnt es jedoch nirgends.

Das schwerwiegendste Problem mit Wulfs fichteanischer Darstellung der romantischen Bewegung ist, dass sich alle Romantiker Ende der 1790er Jahre offen gegen die Philosophie Fichtes rebellierten. Hölderlin, Novalis, Schelling, Schleiermacher und Schlegel lehnten das fichtesche Ich als ihren Grundsatz ab, weil sie es als endlich, als einseitig oder durch das Nicht-Ich begrenzt betrachteten. Das Ich war die *subjektive* Seite des Absoluten; aber es hatte auch eine *objektive* Seite, das ganze Reich der Natur. Für die Romantiker war das Absolute die *Einheit* von Subjektivem und Objektivem, die *Identität* bzw. der „*Indifferenzpunkt*“ des Ich mit dem Nicht-Ich. Die Unterschiede zwischen den Romantikern und Fichte zeigen sich am deutlichsten in ihren einander widersprechenden Naturkonzeptionen. Für Fichte

⁴ *Fabelhafte Rebellen*, S. 69. Vgl. *Magnificent Rebels*, 150.

war die Natur nur das Nicht-Ich, das Hindernis für das unendliche Streben des Ichs; für die Romantiker war die Natur ein Organismus, ein Zweck an sich, von dem das Ich nur ein Modus ist.

Wulf stellt fest, dass sich in den 1790er Jahren ein wichtiger Wandel im romantischen Denken vollzog, aber sie spielt ihn herunter, weil er ihrer zentralen These widerspricht, dass das Herzstück des romantischen Projekts „die neue Betonung des Ich“ gewesen sei. Sie erwähnt kaum einige jener Manuskripte, in denen die romantische Rebellion gegen Fichte am deutlichsten zum Ausdruck kommt: Novalis' *Fichte-Studien*, Hölderlins Fragment „Urteil und Sein“, Schleiermachers *Über die Religion* und Schlegels Notizbücher aus den späten 1790er Jahren. Sie sagt, dass Schleiermachers Religion immer noch fichteanisch gefärbt sei, weil sie „persönlich und intim“ war⁵; aber das ist nur ein Feigenblatt, um Schleiermachers Spinozismus zu verbergen, das genaue Gegenteil vom Fichteanismus.

Die fichteanische Dimension der Jenenser Romantik ist eine alte Idee. Sie taucht zum ersten Mal in Rudolf Hayms *Die romantische Schule* auf, die 1870 erstmals veröffentlicht wurde. Hayms Buch gilt heute allgemein als überholt. Im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts hat die Erforschung der Romantik durch die Entdeckung und Veröffentlichung von Manuskripten, die früheren Gelehrten nicht zugänglich waren, exponentiell zugenommen. Eine weitere Schwäche von Wulfs Buch ist, dass sie die neueste romantische Forschung, insbesondere die Arbeiten von Dieter Henrich und Manfred Frank, nicht berücksichtigt. Hätte sie deren Arbeiten studiert, hätte sie die Schwäche ihrer Betonung von Fichte erkannt.

Anstatt die romantische Forschung voranzubringen, hat Wulf sie unwissentlich zurückgeworfen. *Fabelhafte Rebellen* bietet dem Nicht-Fachmann eine unterhaltsame, jedoch philosophisch fehlinformierte Geschichte. (Wenn man nach den besten und neuesten Forschungen über die Romantiker sucht, findet man sie in einer neuen Zeitschrift, *Symphilosophie: Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik*, herausgegeben von Laure Cahen-Maurel und Giulia Valpione.) Wir brauchen mehr Romantikforschung; aber nicht von der Art, die Wulfs Buch bietet.

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⁵ *Fabelhafte Rebellen*, S. 291. Vgl. *Magnificent Rebels*, 705.

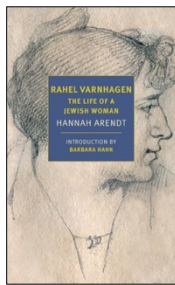
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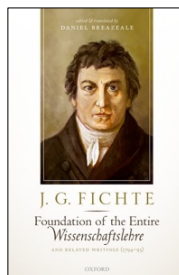
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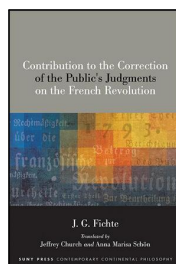
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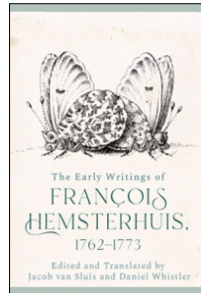
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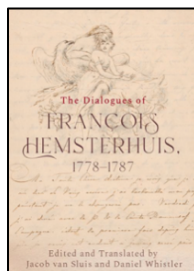
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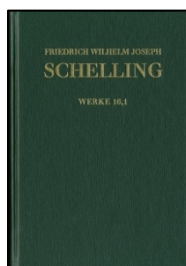
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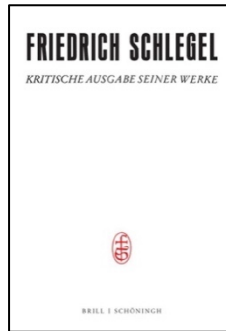
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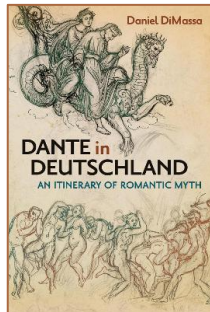
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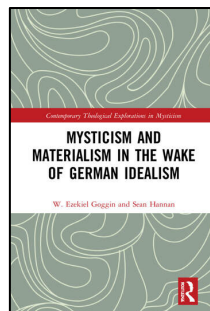
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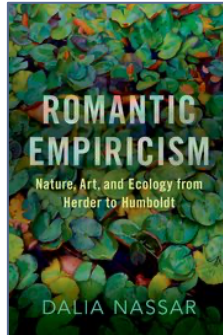
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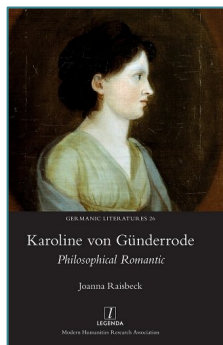
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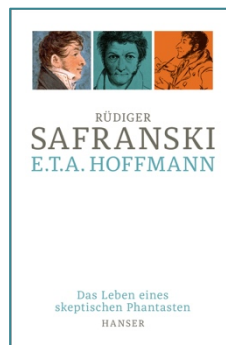
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Guido Seddone, *Hegel's Theory of Self-conscious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), x + 165 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-52602-0

Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Hegels Wissenschaft der Logik. Ein dialogischer Kommentar*, Bd. 3: „Die subjektive Logik. Die Lehre vom Begriff“, Hamburg, Meiner, 2022, 1196 S., ISBN 978-3787329779

Tobias Wieland, *Die Pluralität des Absoluten. Hegels Theorie sozialen Wandels*, Frankfurt a. M., Klostermann, 2022, 512 S., ISBN 978-3465045946

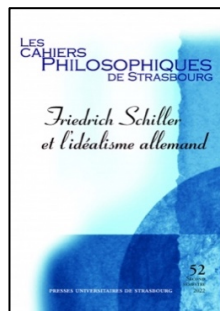
Schelling

Lore Hühn, Sebastian Schwenzfeuer (Hg.), „*Wir müssen also auch über den Staat hinaus!*“: *Schellings Philosophie des Politischen*, Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2022, 302 S., ISBN 978-3848740284

Benjamin Norris, *Schelling and Spinoza: Realism, Idealism, and the Absolute* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2022), 310 pp., ISBN 9781438489537

3. Journals | Zeitschriften | Revues | Riviste

Henny Blomme, Laure Cahen-Maurel, David W. Wood (eds.), “Friedrich Schiller et l’idéalisme allemand / Friedrich Schiller and German Idealism”, *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg* 52 (2022). Contributors: María del Rosario Acosta López, Frederick C. Beiser, Henny Blomme, Laure Cahen-Maurel, Louis Carré, Katia Hay, Jeremy D. Hovda, Quentin Landenne, Charlotte Morel, Cody Staton, and David W. Wood.



Daniel Breazeale, Kienhow Goh, David W. Wood (eds.), *FICHTEANA: Review of J.G. Fichte Research* 22 (2022).



Richard Faber, Dennis F. Mahoney, Gabriele Rommel, Nicholas Saul (Hg.), *Blütenstaub. Jahrbuch für Frühromantik*, Bd. 7 (2022).

Lore Hühn, Philipp Höfele, Philipp Schwab, Paul Ziche (Hg.), *Schelling-Studien: Internationale Zeitschrift zur klassischen deutschen Philosophie*, Bd. 9, 2022.

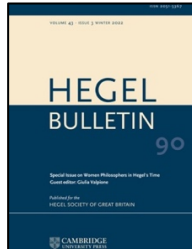
Michael Lewin, Rudolf Meer (eds.), “Kant’s Transcendental Dialectic: A Re-Evaluation”, *Open Philosophy* 5 (2022).

Sean J. McGrath, Kyla Bruff, Alisan Genc (eds.), *Kabiri: The Official Journal of the North American Schelling Society* 3 (2021).

Birgit Sandkaulen, Brady Bowman (Hg.), *Hegel-Studien*, Bd. 56, 2022.

Simone Tarli, Federica Pitillo, Matteo V. D'Alfonso (a cura di), "Une ricerca in divenire. Nuove prospettive su Schelling", *Lo Sguardo. Rivista di filosofia*, n. 30, 2021 / I.

Giulia Valpione (ed.), "Women Philosophers in Hegel's Time", *Hegel Bulletin* 43 / 3 (2022). Contributors: Adrian Daub, Anne Pollok, Alison Stone, Giulia Valpione, Ulrike Wagner, Martina Wernli.



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Conferences | Tagungen | Colloques | Convegni & Call for Papers

Conference: *Hegel's Metaphysics: Dead or Alive? On the contemporary relevance of Hegel's metaphysics*

9-10 January 2023, Padua, Italy

Organisation: Karen Koch and Elena Tripaldi

Contact: paduaberlinworkshop@gmail.com

Online seminar: *Hegel's Concept of Tragedy – An Inquiry into the Hegelian System*

11 January 2023, on Zoom (at 2:30 pm GMT)

Organisation: Universidade de Coimbra

Programm : Rachel Falkenstern (St. Francis College, New York), "Hegel on Schiller's Late Romantic Tragic Heroines" & Francesco Campana (Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici, Roma), "Tragedy and Irony: On Hegel and the Early German Romantics"

Further information: https://www.uc.pt/fluc/dfci/hegel_concept_of_tragedy

Workshop: *Dynamics and Reason: A Workshop on Du Châtelet and Kant*

9-10 February 2023, Paderborn University, Germany

Organisation: Ruth Hagenruber and Aaron Wells

Further information:

<https://philevents.org/event/show/101502>

Conference: *Hegel und die praktische Philosophie - Philosophischer Meisterkurs mit Michael Quante*

13-15 February 2023, Katholische Akademie Bayern, Munich, Germany

Further information:

<https://www.hfph.de/hochschule/veranstaltungen/meisterkurs-2023>

Conference: *Leben im Fokus: Die Naturphilosophie um 1800 im Kontext biozentrischer Debatten der Umweltethik*

20-22 April 2023, University of Kiel, Germany

Organisation: Konrad Ott, Georg Oswald

Workshop: *Kant and Negative Aesthetics*

6-7 June 2023, Pavia, Italy

Contact: kantaesthetics@gmail.com

Conference: *“More than a machine” – On the human being in Kant and post-Kantian Philosophy*

20-21 June 2023, Radboud University, The Netherlands

Organisation: Manja Kisner, Giovanni Pietro Basile

CFP: Conference: *Existence, Cognition, Action: Kant’s Legacy for the 21st Century*

1-3 March 2023, University of Belgrade, Serbia (online)

Submission deadline: 1 January 2023

Further information: <https://philevents.org/event/show/100778>

CFP: *Leuven Kant Conference 2023*

1-3 June 2023, University of Leuven, Belgium

Deadline for submissions: 11 January 2023

Further information:

<https://hiw.kuleuven.be/cmprpc/events/leuvenkantconference>

CFP: Conference: *The Persistence of Crisis within Hegel’s Speculative Reason*

28-29 September 2023, University of Basel, Switzerland

Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2023

Contact: gregor.schaefer@unibas.ch

**CFP: 14th International Kant Congress: Kant's Project of
Enlighten-ment**

8-13 September 2024, University of Bonn, Germany

Deadline for submissions: 28 February 2023

Further information:

<https://www.philosophie.uni-bonn.de/de/kant%202024/kant-2024-en>

**Call for Abstracts: "Fichte's Foundation of the Entire
Wissenschaftslehre", Sixteenth Biennial Meeting of the North
American Fichte Society**

15-17 June 2024, University College London, London, UK

Deadline for submissions: 15 November 2023

Contact: Gabriel Gottlieb (Xavier University), fichtesociety@gmail.com

Further information: www.fichtesociety.org

**CFP: Special Issue on "Philosophy and Jena Romanticism", *Human
Affairs. Postdisciplinary Humanities and Social Sciences Quarterly***

Deadline for Abstracts: 31 December 2022

Deadline for Full Papers: 31 May 2023

Further information: <http://www.humanaffairs.sk/call-for-papers/>

**CFP: Special Issue on "Staël et la philosophie / Staël and
Philosophy", *Cahiers Staëliens*, n° 73**

Guest editors: Johanna Lenne-Cornuez (Sorbonne Université) & Charlotte Sabourin (Douglas College, British Columbia)

Abstract submission deadline: 15 December 2022

Paper submission deadline: 30 June 2023

Further information:

<https://www.avldigital.de/en/networking/details/callforpapers/stael-et-la-philosophie-cahiers-staeliens-n-73/>

**CFP: Special Issue on "Kant, race, and racism: understanding and
reckoning", *Rivista di estetica* 3 / 2024**

Editors: Gabriele Gava (University of Turin), Huaping Lu-Adler

(Georgetown University) and Achim Vesper (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Submission deadline: 31 October 2023

Further information:

<http://labont.it/estetica/index.php/rivistadiestetica/about>

CFP: Special Issue on “Assent, Belief, and Testimony in Kant and his Predecessors”, *Inquiry*

Guest editors: Gabriele Gava (University of Turin) and Jakub Techert (FU Berlin / Goethe Universität Frankfurt)

Submission deadline: 30 December 2023

Further information: <http://www.hegelpd.it/hegel/cfp-assent-belief-and-testimony-in-kant-and-his-predecessors-special-issue-of-inquiry/>

CFP: Special Issue on “The French Revolution”, *SGIR Review*

Editors: Lara Ostaric (Temple University) and Joel B. Lande (Princeton University)

Submission deadline: 15 January 2024

Further information: <https://www.thesgir.org/cfp---sgir-review-2023.html>