

Introduction

The writer we know as “Novalis” was born in 1772 as Friedrich von Hardenberg. The manuscripts translated in this volume were compiled between late 1797 and late 1799, most remaining unpublished. The striking range of interests displayed in his notes, philosophical fragments, and short essays reveals Novalis to be one of the most comprehensive thinkers of his generation. He shared in the belief of his contemporaries in the psychological and social value of philosophy, poetry, and the other arts, but since he had also been educated in mathematics and the physical sciences, the dimensions of his writing are far-reaching.

His intellectual profile resembles that of an eighteenth-century polymath such as Diderot or d’Alembert, who wrote expertly on a myriad of scientific and cultural subjects. Indeed, Novalis’s own unfinished project for an encyclopedic work, his *General Draft*, demonstrates his affinity with the *philosophes* whom he admired, even while rejecting their materialism. In spite of the boldness, rigor, and extensive scope of Novalis’s intellectual pursuits, his philosophical work has been largely obscured for those who have thought of him as a prototypical Romantic dreamer. The popularity of his *Hymns to the Night*, a set of dithyrambic poems in verse and prose, and of his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the source of the Romantic archetype of the blue flower, symbol of love and longing, does not prepare the reader for material such as is found in his philosophical manuscripts.

In his original, unprejudiced, and undogmatic questioning of any issue that interests him, Novalis displays to a remarkable degree the kind of innovative thought that will characterize the Romantic movement

throughout Europe. Being a practicing scientist and creative writer as well as possessing a comprehensive approach to theoretical inquiry that in his time was what was meant by “philosophical,” Novalis engages with a wider spectrum of questions than do most of his contemporaries. But it is his readiness to subject any philosophical concept to radical interrogation that marks his published and unpublished work as of enduring interest. For contemporary readers accustomed to the critique of the categories of reason that has followed in the wake of Nietzsche, Novalis’s writings can seem uncannily pertinent. They address issues that in recent years have continued to expand the parameters of our thinking on truth and objectivity, language and mind, symbol and representation, reason and the imagination. In form and style too, Novalis’s manuscripts demonstrate the associative fluidity of thought characteristic of Nietzsche. They proceed by intuitive and imaginative reasoning, rather than sustained systematic argument, in a manner that has become familiar in the writing of Derrida and others in our time. His adoption of the Romantic fragment, a self-conscious and self-contained short prose form created in particular by Friedrich Schlegel to allow maximum flexibility in working out new and developing ideas, is ideally suited to his own quicksilver movement between subjects. In looking at the most important of his themes, it will be appropriate as well to point to the affinities between his approaches and his philosophical style and some of those current today.

Friedrich von Hardenberg was born in central Germany at Oberwiederstedt, in the region of Halle. As the eldest son of a family belonging to the minor aristocracy, Friedrich was tutored at home. He grew up in a household presided over by a devoted mother and a deeply religious father with close ties to the Moravian Brethren of Herrnhut in Saxony. A strong sense of family as the primary community and model for all others, as well as the pietist emphasis on personal faith and mystical communication with God, were aspects of Hardenberg’s early years that proved to be enduring elements of his thought. While a law student at Jena, Leipzig, and Wittenberg between 1790 and 1794, Hardenberg made the acquaintance of Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, and Fichte, and began to write poetry. Schiller, a historian and philosopher as well as a poet and dramatist, was, with Goethe, one of the two preeminent literary figures of the age. Schlegel, himself still a student, was to be a leader in the field of aesthetics and cultural theory in the late 1790s, at the center of a group that came to be known as the Romantic school.

The next three years saw Hardenberg engaged in intensive philosophical study, principally devoted to Kant and especially Fichte, whose writings, above all his *Theory of Scientific Knowledge* (1794), were received with enthusiasm by the young generation. His interest in mathematics and science, especially geology and mining, was stimulated by his father's appointment as director of the Saxon saltworks, and Hardenberg decided to embark on a course of study at the celebrated mining academy in Freiberg. Meanwhile he had been profoundly moved by the deaths of his young fiancée Sophie von Kühn and his brother Erasmus. These experiences, and the shadow of tuberculosis that lay over countless young people of his own age, prompted Hardenberg to a kind of mystical meditation on death and the possibility of resurrection, themes that became the subject of the poetic cycle *Hymns to the Night*. Late in 1797 he devoted himself intensively to study of the Dutch philosopher Hemsterhuis, whose concept of a moral sense and emphasis on the cognitive validity of poetic language and of feeling impressed him profoundly. He recorded his studies of Kant, Fichte, and Hemsterhuis in a number of philosophical notebooks, the first in a series that was to be continued throughout his life.

In the short years that remained before his death in March 1801, Hardenberg steeped himself in all aspects of contemporary thought, often exchanging ideas with the Schlegel circle, among whom was the philosopher Schelling. He continued to write poetry and prose fiction, as well as to explore philosophical, aesthetic, mathematical, and scientific topics in his notebooks. After completing his studies in Freiberg, Hardenberg became engaged to be married for a second time and applied successfully for a position as district administrator in Thuringia. However, late in 1800 his health began to fail rapidly and it became apparent that tuberculosis would defeat his hope of marriage and plans for further philosophical and literary works.

In the winter of 1797–1798, during his first months in Freiberg, Hardenberg prepared a collection of fragments, *Miscellaneous Observations*, as his first philosophical publication. It initially appeared under the title *Pollen*, and was signed with the pseudonym “Novalis,” which means “one who opens up new land.” The name had traditional associations with the Hardenberg family, but was particularly apt in view of the author's description of his own work as “literary seedings.” This was Novalis's interpretation of the concept of *Symphilosophie*, or collaboration in philosophy, by which the Schlegel circle characterized their joint

work as a kind of philosophical conversation. The Romantic fragment, sometimes brief and aphoristic, sometimes extended to several paragraphs, was conceived by its practitioners as specially suited to collaborative work, but the form also allowed Novalis to move in free association across any aspect of intellectual life. The idea of cultivating and fertilizing new land was evoked in the imagery of the published title, *Pollen*, and the epigraph to it: "Friends, the soil is poor, we must sow abundant seeds/ So that even modest harvests will flourish." These metaphors make explicit Novalis's concept of philosophical discourse not as something closed and finite but as a dynamic movement of thought. During the first half of 1798 Novalis continued to work on his philosophical notebooks; two selections from these unpublished manuscripts are translated here under the heading *Logological Fragments*.

Belief in spirituality, the conviction of human otherness as against the animal and inanimate worlds, is the grounding axiom of Novalis's thought. The hierarchy of spiritual value is extended by the positing of a higher realm of pure spirit, removed in kind from the human as much as the latter is from nonhuman earthly forms. His reading in the history of philosophy made Novalis familiar with Platonic ideas, and like others of his generation such as Hegel and the poet Hölderlin, he is able to reconcile these with Christian conceptions of spirituality. The realm of spirit, the repository of truth, is conceived as the end of all philosophical and creative thought, but Novalis sees the way of its attainment in something other than a search for heterogeneous new discoveries. It is accessible only through perfect self-understanding, which for him is the beginning of all knowledge and all philosophy.

It is apparent that in these interlocking concepts of pure spirit and self-knowledge, Novalis is positing a kind of truth very different from the belief in objective reason that underlies the assumptions of Enlightenment rationalism. Notwithstanding the continuities that link many aspects of eighteenth-century philosophical thinking to that of Novalis's time, such a departure goes far to justify the traditional periodic differentiation between the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The mystical dimension of his religious upbringing disposed Novalis toward nonrational ways of understanding, a direction that was reinforced by his reading of Hemsterhuis. In arguments that privilege introspection and intuition, Novalis insists on the subjective nature of truth: "but is not the universe *within ourselves*? The depths of our spirit are unknown to us—the mysterious way leads inwards" (MO 17).

Drawing a distinction that clarifies his concept of subjective truth, Novalis writes that we can be convinced only of magical or miraculous truth, never of natural truth (LFI 78). With this distinction he circumvents a correspondence theory of truth that would demand validity in terms of objective reality, and puts in its place a self-generating, poetic truth. This truth is the only truth that is accessible to me, for if I look elsewhere then the only difference between truth and delusion lies in their life functions (MO 8). The idea of magical truth will prove to be central to Novalis's aesthetic principle of magical idealism. His rejection of a notion of extrinsic truth that can be uncovered by the exercise of reason is at one with the stance of contemporary pragmatists. Philosophers like Richard Rorty have argued against the assumptions of an objective theory of truth such as that held in the Enlightenment, as the way of discovering "the intrinsic nature of things."¹ Novalis, in contrast, proposes a self-referential model for philosophy which seeks not to explain the world but rather to explain itself; its growth is organic, as a seed emerges from a husk and sprouts to form a new plant (LFI 17). The image recalls his description of his own fragments as "seedings."

In another sense too, Novalis's ideas come close to those of Rorty and others who move out from a subjective notion of truth to a cohesive sense of participation in a human community. What Rorty calls solidarity or ethnocentricity embodies a kind of social optimism that is close to Novalis's post-Enlightenment belief in progress.² If truth is not something to be discovered external to myself, but lies rather in acting according to my convictions (MO 38), it is as much an ethical as an epistemological concept. In this sense, it represents the core of that element of late-eighteenth-century German thought which Novalis shared with his philosophical partners and to which he returns again and again: the social responsibility of the intellectual. The philosopher and the artist are gifted with the ability to recognize magical truth, and are therefore called on to guide others toward this recognition: "We are on a *mission*. Our vocation is the education of the earth" (MO 32). The political and social aspirations derived from the belief in progress will be examined more closely in connection with Novalis's writing on the poetic state, in *Faith and Love or The King and Queen* and *Christendom or Europe*.

Recognition of social responsibility precludes the escapism or narcissism that have sometimes been held to inform Novalis's ideas. Indeed, it is precisely the act of distancing from the self that he characterizes as the highest task of education: ". . . to take command of one's transcendental

self—to be at once the I of its I” (MO 28). As part of his intensive study of Fichte during 1796, Novalis had set out to redefine the relation between the intuitive and cognitive functions of the self, between feeling and reflection, content and form. Through an interactive process that Novalis calls *ordo inversus*, as the self reaches consciousness of itself these two functions come together, subject and object becoming one. This insight underlies Novalis’s theory of representation and his vision of the practice of philosophy as art.

As a creative dynamic, the concept of potentiation or reflection, exemplified in the phrase “the I of its I,” is at the heart of Romantic aesthetics. It is defined by Friedrich Schlegel in terms such as poetry of poetry and philosophy of philosophy, signifying a continuous progression of ever greater intensity and power. But for Novalis the reflection formula has more than purely intellectual force; the *ordo inversus* is infused with a characteristic sense of mystical understanding. He embraces the common goals of the Schlegel circle but endows them with a larger dimension: “The world must be made Romantic. . . . To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power” (LFI 66). Raising the self to the power of itself is perhaps the most consequential of all the Romantic reflection formulas, since it describes a progressive mental act whereby, in perfect self-knowledge, one’s gaze is simultaneously extricated from the bounds of individuality. Not forgetful absorption in the self but the converse, critical contemplation, is the goal: “As we behold ourselves—we give ourselves life” (MO 102). Through the *feeling* of the self *reflecting* on itself, transcendent or magical truth may be revealed.

The coinage “logological” shows a new application of the reflection formula. The notebooks that complement *Miscellaneous Observations* are concerned for the most part with different aspects of philosophy in the past, present, and future. Novalis defines his own practice as “logological,” meaning the activity of logic raised to the power of itself or reflecting on its own nature, where “logic” is used in a nontechnical sense to equate “philosophical discourse.” “Logology,” therefore, is the process of self-conscious reflection on the practice of philosophy, the word itself implying a progressive movement or growth toward a new, higher stage. Novalis restates the grounding principles of his thought: that philosophy is possible at all derives from the ability of the intelligence to act on itself (LFI 22). Philosophy begins with the act of transcending the self (LFI 79).

In a retrospective glance at the evolution of philosophy, Novalis does not undertake a review of historical figures in “lexicographical” or

“philological” fashion, a method he will later deplore (TF 34). It is rather a kind of typology of the organic growth that he describes elsewhere in the metaphor of the seed and the plant. Late-eighteenth-century notions of human progress commonly adopted a triadic pattern, seeing in it evolution from a primitive or chaotic phase through a stage of searching and experimentation toward ultimate resolution. Novalis employs this pattern as he traces three phases of philosophy passing through a process of growth and change (LFI 13). None is identified with a specific historical period, although the third and last may be assumed to be Novalis’s own time or, more properly, the age that was about to dawn. He and his fellow Romantics were conscious of the symbolism of the new century, an awareness that informs much of their writing on history, politics, and culture.

Novalis’s brief overview culminates in a presaging of the philosophy of the new age, when rational argument and intuition will come together in an all-embracing kind of philosophy that is also art. It is the artist who will achieve a necessary synthesis both within himself and, through contemplation of himself, in his vision of the transcendental: “The complete representation of true spiritual life, raised to consciousness through this action, is *philosophy kat exochen*.” The universe of the spiritual or of magical truth reflected in art becomes “the kernel or germ of an all-encompassing organism—It is the beginning of a true *self-penetration of the spirit* which never ends.” That art should be perceived as the ultimate phase of philosophy shows Novalis moving radically in the direction of bringing together all dimensions of intellectual life into a whole that is grounded in representation. This vision is guided by the idea of the *ordo inversus*, whereby subject becomes object, self becomes nonself, the symbol becomes the symbolized, and philosophy becomes poetry. The key to these transformations is found in language, the primary site of representation.

The later eighteenth century was a time of much speculation on the origin and nature of language. Rousseau, Herder, and many others differentiated human speech from the articulations of animals by reference to the concept of “instinct,” which was believed to be weak in human beings in comparison with animals. It was therefore held that language must be a function of reason, something other than instinct, and arrived at by imitation and analogy. When we read what Novalis has to say about language, however, it is arresting to find a different position that is much closer to theories widely accepted today. *Miscellaneous Observations* and the *Logological Fragments* as well as the *Monologue*, a short essay on language, include many passages that show that Novalis believed language to

be an innate quality of the mind and that human beings possess the instinct to speak.³

In line with his principle of self-knowledge as the essential first step toward philosophy, Novalis focuses on the mental capacity that is the prerequisite of knowledge: "How can a person have a sense of something if he does not have the germ of it within himself. What I am to understand must develop organically within me" (MO 19). Elsewhere he speaks explicitly of an organ of thought comparable with the eye or the ear, and of ordinary communication as the "product of the higher organ of language" (LFII 19, 36). Language is "a product of the organic drive for development. . . . It has a positive, free origin" (LFI 83).⁴ Just as the innateness hypothesis has led many modern linguists to move away from the belief that language is culturally determined, Novalis argues against the notion that language arises as a result of sense impressions, defining it rather as a system of nonsensory or immediate knowledge: "All sense perception is at secondhand" (LFI 72).

Seeking to identify the mental processes involved in the attainment of language, Novalis distinguishes between what he calls the mechanics and the dynamics of thinking (LFI 15). The mechanics of thinking he designates as "the grammar of higher language or thought" or as "common logic," a term that in this context ought not to be equated with the root or factor of "logology," that is, as philosophical discourse in a general sense, but rather as a mental function. The idea of a grammar or logic of higher language, a "physiology of concepts," is very close to the Chomskian theory of universal grammar, the "organ" that underlies all human language. Within the innate structures of thinking, Novalis continues, a dynamics is produced, which he calls "metaphysics," which has to do with "original mental powers." These powers are the productive or generative aspect of thinking, "the soul of the philosophy of mind." Novalis has arrived at a position espoused by Steven Pinker and other Chomskians, who hold that we think in a special language of thought or mentalese, in which there are many more concepts than words.⁵ "How often one feels the poverty of words," Novalis remarks, "to express several ideas all at once" (MO 70). "Words are a deceptive medium for what is already thought" (LFI 3).

Nonetheless, language provides the fabric from which we fashion our intuited sense of things. For the philosopher-artist, language's power of symbolization provides an essential tool. As we have seen, Novalis is prepared to accept that there is no objective form of truth but only that

which we arrive at by introspection and feeling: "All cognition, knowledge etc. may well be reduced to comparisons, resemblances" (LFI 68). Through the working of the *ordo inversus*, our intuitive perception of objects and ideas is transformed into cognition as we distinguish them by name. Naming is perhaps the first and the simplest form of symbolization; once a name is established, it takes on a functional value of its own, giving form to our intuited understanding. Using cosmological imagery that is complementary to his customary seeding metaphor, Novalis marvels at the insight derived from this moment of language made conscious in naming: "How easy is it then to make use of the universe! how visible is the concentricity of the spiritual world!" (MO 2). Intuition and cognition are bound together in a kind of hermeneutic circle, so that all we perceive and understand is held in a centripetal relationship, each element illuminating the whole and being illuminated by it. The argument is summed up aphoristically: "Several names are of benefit to an idea" (MO 36).

The symbolic function of language takes on particular significance for Novalis, given his belief in the validity of mystical understanding and its admission to the discourse of philosophy. From his study of Hemsterhuis, Novalis adopted the idea that all knowledge must be articulated poetically, and he stresses the cognitive aspect of poetic thinking in many contexts. With many of his contemporaries he recognized the supreme achievement of Fichte as the creation of a new kind of language that made it possible for philosophical writing to become poetic. His aspiration to emulate or to surpass Fichte in this respect led him to write of the need for a special "language of tropes and riddles" to be used for initiates (FL 1), but more persuasively he demonstrated its principles in the figurative and rhetorical style of his own language.

The short essay known as the *Monologue* celebrates the mysterious working of intuitive language, relating it to magical truth. This truth is uncovered by introspection but also through the spontaneous and generative power of a language that is conscious only of itself. Such inner language is close to song in that it is produced or modulated without choice or intention, like sensation or consciousness itself (cf. TF 47). It becomes poetry in its ability to construct the transcendental or magical world in the language of symbols (LFI 42). In the *Monologue* Novalis compares language to mathematics, finding the essence of each in their autonomous character, since they relate in their generative structure purely to themselves and not to anything external. But language is

endowed with the power of symbolization that allows it to create for us an image of the world.

In his conception of the new art of philosophy as a kind of world-making, Novalis demonstrates how far he has come from the idea of art as mimesis. More than once he makes explicit that the doctrine of imitation in the arts must be overcome: "Poetry too must simply be merely sensible—*artificial—invented*. . . . Even in the theatre the principle of imitation of nature still tyrannizes" (LaF 45). In this respect he may be seen to share in the turning away from the aesthetics of mimesis that pervades the last third of the eighteenth century. But neither does he accept the expressivist theory that for many was the successor to the doctrine of mimesis. As may be expected from his observations on the creative activity of language in shaping its own world, Novalis conceives of poetry, the highest form of all language, as something that creates rather than imitates, that speaks rather than expresses anything extrinsic, even the thoughts or feelings of its originator.

The assumption of autonomy in poetic and philosophical discourse underlies all his discussion of the nature of representation in metaphor, image, and symbol. Once more Novalis anticipates contemporary views on the language and the metaphorical function of art. Nelson Goodman has argued that the arts neither depict nor express anything in the life-world. Rather, they refer metaphorically to the world by possessing certain features of it within their own symbolic system.⁶ The coherence of any art work, that which makes it intelligible, does not derive from extrinsic factors made present by imitation or expression. It stems from the autonomous meaning constructed within its symbolic system and the particular "voice" that allows its symbolism to be articulated. Goodman's theory of metaphorical reference in art is analogous to Rorty's rejection of the correspondence theory of truth in favor of one that posits a self-contained cognitive world. For Novalis, just as magical truth is not a reflection of something extrinsic to the self but rather is constructed by the self in contemplation of itself, so art is not imitation of external reality but a new world made by its own autonomous activity.

In applying his theory of the autonomy of art to particular literary forms, Novalis distinguishes between artificial and natural or artless poetry. If poetry, on the one hand, at a less perfect stage of its development betrays a specific purpose, as allegory or rhetoric may do, then it remains for Novalis in the category of artificial poetry (LFII 15), where representation is subjugated to the explicit purpose of communication. Natural

poetry, on the other hand, is free, undetermined, and immediate, directly combining communication and representation as the language of hieroglyphs once did. For Novalis as for his colleagues of the Romantic school, the novel, a kind of narrative that had become established only in the last generation in Germany, was the literary form par excellence. Novalis adapts Friedrich Schlegel's theory of the novel as a progressive, universal form for the modern age in his own terminology. The novel, paradigm of natural poetry, is not constrained by the demands of imitation, expression, or formal tradition; it is free to grow organically as philosophy does. In illustration of the formula of potentiation, Novalis writes that the novel grows in a movement of geometrical progression (LFI 28). But besides the novel Novalis seeks to bring many other kinds of narrative into his definition of natural poetry.

A section of his notebooks headed "Anecdotes" (LFII 11–16) contains a discussion of story telling as a way of representing magical truth. His emphasis here is not on the novel or any modern narrative ("The world of books is indeed only a caricature of the real world" LFII 20), but on a form of poetry yet to be achieved. The purely poetic anecdote, a story that refers only to itself (LFII 12), will signal the attainment of a new, higher phase of art through the poeticization of the present world. Presaging some of the genres of later European Romanticism, Novalis evokes symbolic or prelinguistic narratives such as are found in dream, myth, magic, or fairy tale (cf. MO 100). These are the models for his own fiction in *The Apprentices at Saïs* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In exploring the cognitive aspect of symbolic poetic forms, Novalis begins to open up a theory of representation that is central to his conception of poetic truth.

In his exploration of what it is to be human, Novalis refers to a higher realm of spirit, or magical truth. Only in relation to this realm does the human being acquire meaning. Asking what a human being is, Novalis finds an answer in a rhetorical figure: "A perfect trope of the spirit" (LFII 5). In another part of the notebooks the same idea of metaphor is extended: "The world is a *universal trope* of the spirit—a symbolic picture of it" (TF 25). These profound and puzzling ideas are further pursued in entries in his *General Draft* for an encyclopedia, under the keywords "cosmology" and "psychology." Cosmological thinking for Novalis has to do with our perception of the world and our interaction with it. But the notion of human being and world as metaphors of the spirit touches more intimately on the question of how we perceive and

feel the relations between all three; it is a psychological question. Under this head, Novalis argues that to understand anything we need to see it represented, however much the character of its representation at first seems paradoxical (GD 1).

Novalis has made clear that the dynamic of language as of art is not imitation but a spontaneous, intuitive movement. Representation, as a function of mind, is for him equally far from the imitation of anything observed or conceived a priori. "All representation," he writes (GD 40), "rests on making present that which is not present." His examples are the ideals or hypotheses that he refers to elsewhere as cultural goals: eternal peace or the golden age, for instance. When we explain what we mean by these we construct an image of them so that the listener or reader can grasp their nature. Representation then becomes a kind of implied "conversation," in the sense of Richard Rorty, in that "making present that which is not present" sets up a series of questions and answers to consider its character and the possibility of its realization.⁷ In this way, for example, self and nonself each represent the other and can thereby approach both mutual and self-understanding (GD 1).

His theory of mutual representation allows Novalis to assert the paradoxical identity of self and nonself (LFI 59). He describes this insight as "the highest principle of all *learning* and *art*," and writes: "It is *all one* whether I posit the universe in myself or myself in the universe" (GD 31), since the presence of one will simultaneously make metaphorically present the other that was absent. These paradoxes are reminiscent of Hegel's idea of *Verrücktheit* (madness or disruption), whereby consciousness becomes capable of escaping from the limitations of self, an indispensable first step toward discovery of the language of the spirit.⁸ But it is not to be forgotten that Novalis is himself using the language of tropes in making these statements. They are rhetorical stratagems designed to set up a conversation in his own mind and in that of the reader.

In a veritably Derridean deferral of closure, undermining any literal acceptance of a theory of representation, he remarks that every symbol has its countersymbol. The image and the original are never identical, no matter how close the resemblance; representation is never complete (GD 36). So the open-endedness of his philosophical discourse is demonstrated at the very moment when Novalis is expounding its central idea. It is significant that the entry where he notes, without further comment: "Theory of the *mutual representation of the universe*," is under the keyword "Magic" (GD 12). The realm of magic occupies a pivotal place for

Novalis both conceptually and in his poetic work, but these insights do not prevent him from exploring more practical and even mundane areas of inquiry, among them social life, science, and politics.

Novalis once commented that the distractions of ordinary life inhibit “the higher development of our nature. Divinatory, magical, truly poetic people cannot come into being under circumstances such as ours” (LFI 27). A visit to the spa resort of Teplitz in the summer of 1798, however, finds him seeking to apply philosophical thinking to the affairs of the world. The new direction is marked with the comment: “Notes in the margin of life.” A series of entries touch on everyday things—foods, illness, the relations between men and women, the role of religion in society. In a letter to Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis describes his philosophy of everyday life as “moral astronomy in the sense of Hemsterhuis.” The metaphor emphasizes the importance of centripetal social mechanisms and the communal obligations within them, exemplified by the practices of religion.

Elsewhere he acknowledges the need for a mediator in the practice of religion (MO 73), and for the Christian, the supreme form of mediation is found in the symbolic commemorative meal of the Eucharist with its sacrificial reference. Many layers of meaning are suggested by the Eucharist in the light of Novalis’s theory of mutual representation. The physical consumption of the Eucharist is a metaphor for the spiritual partaking of the divine, when the absent body of Christ is made present. Reflecting on the blending of physical and spiritual substance embodied in the sacrament, Novalis sees it as something like an embrace, an exchange of love (TF 1), and Christ therefore as “*the key to the world*” (TF 36). But Novalis draws a further parallel between the significance of the Eucharist and the consumption of ordinary food in the company of friends. We depend on the natural world for survival, yet we depend as much for spiritual food on friendship and the company of those we love. Eating becomes a trope where body is substituted for spirit (TF 11).

In writing of the love between men and women, Novalis begins with the simple note “Sofie, or on women” (TF 15). In March 1797, Novalis’s first fiancée, Sophie von Kühn, died at the age of fifteen. Her name retained something like religious significance for him. It symbolizes love and womanhood, but it also represents philosophy, the pursuit of which, since his engagement to Sophie, was infused in his mind with the idea of love. He describes philosophy as like a caress (LFI 12) or a first kiss (LFI 57). The kind of poetic philosophy to which Novalis aspires, and that is

both the end and the means of Romanticizing the world, is an all-embracing, creative activity, comparable only to love, “the *unum* of the universe” (GD 2). In social terms, marriage and the family represented for Novalis the immediate context of love, centering on a woman as wife and mother.

In respect of matters having significant personal or emotional content Novalis appears more constrained by historical context than in addressing abstract questions of metaphysics or epistemology. To a modern reader, his reflections on women betray an essentialist point of view that seems little enlightened by his unprejudiced and even progressive attitudes on issues such as politics and the state. Using an analogy that objectifies women and denies them any real intellectuality, Novalis remarks that they are “similar to the infinite in that they cannot be squared” (TF 17). This is as much as to say that women are incapable of self-knowledge, the beginning of all philosophy, which is attained by raising the self to the power of itself. Women are inert: sometimes idle and helpless like children, sometimes remote and inspiring like higher beings. Like nature, they are present yet ineluctable, mysterious yet ordinary. Only in respect of the capacity to love does Novalis acknowledge the moral strength of women to be very great.

The analogy drawn here between women and nature suggests that Novalis might conceive the natural world also not as open to definitive analysis or description, as Enlightenment science had assumed, but only to hypothesis. We are today accustomed to questioning the objectivity of scientific truth as much as any defined within the area of metaphysics, but it is perhaps inappropriately consequential that we should look for such approaches in Novalis. In his observations on the natural sciences, Novalis rarely asks questions that would match those he poses in regard to philosophical truth. He draws clear distinctions between science and philosophy, asserting that the former is determinate while the latter is indeterminate (LFII 31); philosophy is not concrete as are mathematics and physics (GD 34). Mechanical causation, something with which the mining engineer Friedrich von Hardenberg was obliged to be familiar, is “unnatural to the spirit” (LFII 17). Yet Novalis maintained that all learning must become one (MO 4, LaF 39), envisioning a blending of knowledges in a universal formation of individual and community. In this desire to incorporate the natural sciences into a seamless study of knowledge Novalis is at his most characteristic.

Soon after the Teplitz visit, Novalis began the series of notebooks that he called his *General Draft* for an encyclopedia. It ranges over philos-

ophy and religion, science and mathematics, politics, literature and the arts, sexuality and psychology. A selection designed to give some idea of the scope of the encyclopedic project is translated here. The theoretical perspectives opened up in the *General Draft*, on which he worked throughout the winter of 1798–1799, show the impact of his professional scientific activities and his literary plans, as well as the published work of his Romantic colleagues and conversations with them. An example of this cross-fertilization is his response to Friedrich Schlegel's review of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. The review, published in July 1798, prompted Novalis to further reflection on the novel and other types of narrative, but it also led him to consider Goethe's work in a quite new way.

In his short essay on Goethe, his only extended piece of criticism, he discusses the latter's scientific essays together with his fiction. He sees Goethe's study of botany and optics as complementary to his creative writing. Conversely, his way of contemplating nature as an artist means "in a certain sense that Goethe is the first physicist of his age." In either field, his supreme powers of representation lift his work to the level of applied philosophy. Novalis perceives Goethe's achievement as an example of what he advocates as the coming phase of philosophy, in this case natural philosophy, as art. In the manuscripts the Goethe essay is followed by a series of entries on various scientific, medical, and literary topics, somewhat in the style of the *General Draft*, which he was about to begin. They are complemented by a number of observations on painting and sculpture, prompted by a visit to the Dresden Gallery in the company of other members of the Schlegel group.

The Gallery housed one of the finest collections in Europe, including Raphael's Sistine Madonna, many fine Dutch and Italian landscapes, and an impressive set of plaster reproductions of Greek sculptures. Novalis's notebooks at this time record how the collection provided "a storeroom of indirect stimuli of all kinds for the poet" (OG 26). Typically his observations take him away from particular examples to new theoretical positions. Landscape painting leads him to reflect on the chemistry, botany, and geology of natural landscape, thus pursuing the kind of organic reasoning ("*thinking in the body*" OG 25) that he praised in Goethe. The antiquities prompt more far-reaching questions on our perception of history and the possibility of progress.

In this context Novalis demonstrates that his thinking about science and nature is embryonically as open to reconsideration as his more articu-

lated ideas on truth and representation. In the Goethe essay he draws an inspired comparison between our informed contemplation or, in modern terminology, our construction of antiquity and a possible way of contemplating nature that is modern and specific to our time: "Nature and insight into nature come into being at the same time, like antiquity and the knowledge of antiquities." Neither "antiquity" nor "nature" exist as concepts until the modern mind constructs them as such. Just as truth is not something to be discovered but something made by us, so the world of history and the natural world have first to be perceived as entities accessible to our understanding before they can be said to exist conceptually. This incipient questioning of the assumptions of science as an objective study of nature remains undeveloped. But it is tempting to speculate that, had Novalis lived longer, he may have interrogated the premises of scientific inquiry with the same blend of skepticism and passion he brought to philosophy.

Much of the last two years of Novalis's life was devoted to professional work and to creative writing. But he continued to work on his philosophical and scientific notebooks, and also completed the essay *Christendom or Europe*. In the decade after the French Revolution, debate on the desirable form of the state continued in Germany as elsewhere in Europe. For Novalis, that form could only be one that embodied the ideal of Romanticization; the poetic state was to be the state of the future, just as philosophy and all forms of knowledge were to become poetic. Political observations are scattered throughout the unpublished manuscripts, and Novalis had already achieved a degree of notoriety as a political thinker with his second published collection of fragments, *Faith and Love or The King and Queen*, which appeared in July 1798 in the Berlin journal *Yearbooks of the Prussian Monarchy*.

King Frederick William III and Queen Luise of Prussia ascended the throne at the end of 1797. Unlike their predecessors, they were known for their domestic and familial virtue, so providing Novalis with the perfect symbolism to clothe his ideas on monarchy and the poetic state. There is no question of his legitimist views, but as in all other fields, Novalis's political attitudes take some unexpected turns, and in any case they are directed less toward present circumstances than toward a future ideal. He sees the royal family above all as a model for the society of which it is the pinnacle, while the queen is the inspiration for the king to fulfil his own role (FL 24). Novalis's idealization of the figure of the queen undoubtedly owes much to the real person of the youthful, upright, and

gracious Queen Luise, but his portrait is primarily a stylized image of the place of love in the ideal society. If *faith* in the monarchy as the only form of government is essential for the poetic state, it is equally indispensable that *love* be recognized as the element that binds all the members of the state together.

Consistent with most later eighteenth-century writers on the political form of the state, Novalis sees no contradiction between a monarchy and republican government, but rather maintains that king and republic can only exist with each other (FL 22). A republic constitutes that kind of government where the people, or their representatives, have some share in the affairs of state. But for Novalis the monarch is the linchpin in the symbolic hierarchy that constitutes the national community. The king is therefore the true representation of the *res publica*, given the literal meaning of the republic as the public good. Democracy is posited as the equivalent of monarchy where the latter represents the total will of the people (MO 122). Institutional democracy, which rests on the decisions of the majority, is likely to be something imperfect, very different from the symbolic, aesthetic kind embodied in the monarch, who is the natural exemplar of his people in a way no elected representative can be. True democracy can be found where “the original laws of humanity” (FL 67) take shape in the most natural way, in the monarchy.

Notwithstanding political judgments in defence of the monarchy, which appear to be inflexibly conservative, Novalis’s comments on the Revolution are never wholly negative. His witty observation that Burke had written a revolutionary book against the Revolution (MO 115) points to his critical, rather than condemnatory, attitude toward the possibility of fundamental political change. It is consequent on Novalis’s concept of the poetic state that anarchical or negative energy and the loss of a vision of the future should be rejected. However, this is not to say that the productive dynamic of revolutionary action is to be suppressed or denied. Novalis’s conservatism is not reactionary but radical, forcing confrontation of the consequences of revolutionary change as much as of those of sanguine acceptance of the status quo. The collection ends with an appeal for tolerance and maturity, which will lead to “the sublime conviction of the relativity of every positive form” (FL 68). It is a conclusion that seems to betray Novalis’s distaste for the immediacy of political controversy, but which is also at one with the belief in the fluidity of conceptual thinking he shared with the members of the Schlegel circle and their contemporary Hegel.

Novalis's political essay, *Christendom or Europe*, was written in October 1799 under the immediate influence of Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion*. At first reading, *Christendom or Europe* appears to be a work in praise of medieval Catholic Christendom. It has often been cited as evidence of a reactionary tendency to be found in Novalis himself and that is perceived as characteristic of German Romanticism as a whole. While he deplores the divisiveness of the Reformation, Novalis's argument is not directed against change and growth in the religious culture of Europe. "Progressive, ever-expanding evolutions are the stuff of history." He admits the need for the Reformation because of the complacency and materialism that had overtaken the Church, and restrictive measures such as the celibacy of the clergy, but deprecates the schismatic and secular character of Protestantism, particularly its fragmentation in a number of national churches.

Both the Reformation itself and modern philosophy, that is, the French-inspired philosophy of the late eighteenth century, are held by Novalis to be deficient in their pursuit of rational or literal knowledge at the expense of mystery and the supernatural. Protestant emphasis on the Bible rather than tradition and ritual found its eighteenth-century counterpart in a style of learning and education that was fundamentally secular and therefore spiritually sterile. Now, in his own time, Novalis is able to foresee a regeneration of religion out of just that confusion and disorder that he perceives in the modern world as the result of conflicting spiritual and intellectual currents: "True anarchy is the element within which religion is born." It is this turn toward the future that makes *Christendom or Europe* a programmatic work rather than a purely critical one, and that gives the lie to any dismissal of it as reactionary. As in *Faith and Love or The King and Queen*, the assessment of the Revolution here is one of circumspect recognition of its dynamic function in the slow process of change that is the essence of history.

The closing paragraphs of *Christendom or Europe* represent a summation of Novalis's critique of the Enlightenment. He stresses the positive impact of rationalism during the later eighteenth century in providing an extreme position that later thinkers were obliged to counter. But for the domination of reason, the new, productive period that is to come, when poetry will open the door to all the riches of art and nature, would not have been possible. In prophetic mode, Novalis speculates on the possibility of peace and even political union among the European states, arguing dialectically from the upheaval and conflict in Europe in the autumn

of 1799. The integration of philosophy and learning in the new golden age can perhaps be matched by the political integration of the states of Europe, if the present wars can be turned to good account and a sense of wholeness revived. What had seemed a nostalgic rhapsody in praise of the unity of medieval Christendom now appears as a symbolic argument positing an ideally harmonious world in political as well as philosophical terms. A vision of the new Jerusalem, presented at the end of the essay, becomes the crowning image of Novalis's hope for the future of Germany and Europe, as it would be in Blake's vision for England a few years later.

Novalis proposes a reconciliation of seemingly disparate ways of appropriating the world. In the practices of art, philosophy, science, and religion we seek to understand ourselves and our place in the world, but if the golden age is to be realized then these discourses must flow together. Within the tendency of his time toward breaking down the barriers between reason and the imagination, Novalis shared in the intellectual ecumenism of Friedrich Schlegel and the synthesizing dynamic of the young Hegel. But his valorization of intuitive thinking brought an additional dimension to his philosophical practice. This quality is best elucidated in his idea of magic as something both liberating and fructifying.

Magic is defined by Novalis in a number of complementary ways. For the individual it is "the art of using the world of the senses at will" (LFI 69), whereby the body is transcended by the spirit. Although he does not employ religious terminology, the parallels to the pietist and mystical thought that shaped his early education are clear. He compares enthusiasm (in the eighteenth-century sense of being filled with God) to a kind of madness "governed by rules and in full consciousness," and continues: "Communal madness ceases to be madness and becomes magic" (LFI 70). If a community so wills, it can transcend the boundaries of the rational and move into a higher realm of experience. "Magic" takes on the character of a universal transformation defined elsewhere by Novalis as "the Romanticization of the world." All learning can be animated by this transformation, for example in "magical chemistry, mechanics, and physics" (GD 2), "magical astronomy, grammar, philosophy, religion" (GD 12).

While *logology* is defined as philosophical discourse raised to the power of itself, it implies still the practice of philosophy in an expert sense, informed by argument and precedent. As against this, magical philosophy is a way of constructing a worldview independently of extrinsic knowledge, much as language arises innately and independently of sen-

sory knowledge. It is a creative act indistinguishable in essence from art. As the supreme human task, it has its foundation in love, which makes all magic possible (GD 7). The resolution of difference, including that between self and other, lies in the free activity of the imagination outside the laws of causation. Then “philosophy appears here entirely as magical idealism” (GD 43). This last explanation is probably the closest we have to a definition of “magical idealism.” It is the philosophy of the future that is also art, magical in that it transcends causation and the senses, ideal since it belongs in the realm of pure spirit to which we aspire. Magical idealism becomes both an artistic and a philosophical principle, making magical truth present in all discourse.

In the notebooks compiled between the spring of 1799 and late autumn 1800, before illness prevented him from continuing them, Novalis turns most often to consideration of poetry and other literary forms. He has much to say about the novel, both in criticism of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* and in evocation of very different narrative styles such as fairy tale. These preoccupations reflect his current work on his own poetic novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, itself an attempt to demonstrate the fusion of prose narrative and poetry. In more theoretical reflections, the poet is compared to a religious prophet in that he has the gift of *speaking* the world of magical philosophy where all exists without cause, “like the sounds of the Aeolian harp” (LaF 1, 42). His world is constructed purely through the exercise of his imagination, as in other transcending states such as mysticism or madness: “The poet is truly bereft of his senses—instead everything takes place within him. In the truest sense he presents *subject object—mind and world*” (LaF 40).

It was the destiny of Novalis’s generation that many died in youth, as he himself did a few weeks before his twenty-ninth birthday. His *Hymns to the Night*, written early in 1800, are a poetic meditation on the mystery of death. In his philosophical fragments Novalis speaks of death positively, seeing it as the ultimate form of transcending the self that is necessary for philosophy to begin, “a victory over the self” (MO 11). Life and death are perceived as two elements of an equation that expresses the coherence of our existence: “Death is at once the end and the beginning—at once separation and closer union of the self. Through death the reduction is complete” (MO 15). In an observation that adds existential force to his characterization of magical idealism, Novalis defines death as “the Romanticizing principle of our life” (LaF 5). If death, like love, can be

construed as that which lends meaning to life, then it signifies freedom from contingency and causation. The way to magical philosophy is open.

There is an exhilarating vigor in Novalis's philosophical writings that stems from their disconcerting heterogeneity as well as their refusal to be bound by established categories. The reader is made aware of an intellectual optimism that pervades all his work, a conviction that the universal synthesis that it envisions can be achieved. Lent impetus by his belief in perfectibility, this conviction explains the engaging sense of being at the threshold of new discovery that underlies all his writing. Novalis can be seen as a thinker who points forward to the new century with its massive social and scientific change, and to kinds of innovation in intellectual and artistic fields that he could not have foreseen, but that are implicit in the open-endedness of his thought.