CHAPTER 6

The 1790s after Fichte: the Romantic appropriation of Kant (I): Hölderlin, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schlegel

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND POST-KANTIAN ROMANTICISM

Among the many clichés about Romanticism is that there is no definition of it since, as a movement of rebellion, it always immediately rebelled against any proposed definition of itself and was thus forever keeping itself out of reach of all those who would pin it down and catalog it. However, like all such clichés, it is a cliché precisely because it captures a central truth about its subject; and, although it means that all generalizations about Romanticism ought to be expressed with so many qualifying clauses as to make the generalization difficult to enforce, it does not rule out looking for at least some general family resemblances in the movement.

Romanticism effectively began in Germany in the late eighteenth century – the term was even coined there, in Jena, most likely by Friedrich Schlegel – and it was at first propagated and developed among a group of young men and women who knew each other and at least for one brief period lived next to each other in Jena or Berlin. It spread from there to England, France, and the rest of Europe (although – again, exceptions need to be noted – Wordsworth was a contemporary of the German Romantics, not their successor). One of the most well-known and often repeated characterizations was made by Hegel, who personally knew the individuals involved while he was in Jena, and who, while rejecting their approach, at the same time incorporated large chunks of it into his own system. The early Romantics, according to Hegel, radicalized a traditional European and Christian conception of purity of heart as a "beautiful soul" into a self-undermining focus on one's own subjectivity and feelings: they thus ended up either as psychologically lamed agents unable to act because doing so would deface their untainted inner unity of soul, or as hypocritical ironists unable to commit

themselves to anything except the smug assertion of their own moral and aesthetic superiority. In tandem with Hegel's rather negative characterization is the traditional charge that the Romantics were simply a rebellion against the Enlightenment, who aspired to re-enchant nature and replace the Newtonian picture of nature as a giant piece of clockwork with an "organic" picture of nature as alive with various life-forces and as ultimately responsive to human wishes and plans.[1]

With some qualifications, both those characterizations capture something true about the Romantics. There is, however, another part to the aspirations of the group that has come to be called the German "early Romantics" (a group that included those who gathered around Jena in the late eighteenth century and who either edited or published in the journal, *Athenäum*, between 1798 and 1800). Among this group were the brothers August and Friedrich Schlegel (both literary critics); the theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher; the writer and critic, Ludwig Tieck; the philosopher, Friedrich Schelling; Caroline Michaelis Böhmer Schlegel Schelling; Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit Schlegel; and the poet, Friedrich von Hardenberg (who wrote under the pen-name, Novalis). Others, like the poet, Friedrich Hölderlin, were associated with the group at one time or another and shared some key ideas with them (although Hölderlin himself is not best characterized as an early Romantic). Others, like the author and statesman Wilhelm von Humboldt, associated at some times with them, although they were not part of the circle. Almost all of them were born around 1770 (as was Beethoven, another key figure of that generation).

Part of their aspirations had been shaped by the ongoing influence of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), who had in fact been Kant's student (although there was later to be a famous break between them), and a great influence on Goethe in the 1760s and 1770s, and who had published several influential pieces long before Kant's first *Critique* had even first appeared. Herder's influence in German culture ran wide and deep: he was the "father" of any number of different movements in German thought, ranging from the study of folklore (which he famously did in tandem with Goethe, collecting German folksongs in Alsace), to the philosophy of history, linguistics, theories of culture, and so forth. Herder's writings were crucially important in the Romantic transformation of the dominant metaphor of nature from that of the "machine" to that of "life" (in other words, away from the mechanical, Newtonian

[1] See Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart* for a treatment of Romanticism (European in general) as both the exploration of subjective interiority and as a re-enchantment of nature.

worldview to the more Romantic, organic worldview). Likewise, Herder was crucial in fashioning a view of agency as "expressivist," rather than mechanical: what distinguishes human agency, so Herder argued, is its capacity for meaning, for which the use of language is crucial, and no naturalistic, mechanical account of language is adequate to capture that sense of meaning. What we mean by words depends on an irreducible sense of normativity in their use, and our grasp of such normativity itself depends on our immersion in a way of life (a "culture"), which functions as a background to all our more concrete uses of language. Since meaning and the expression of meaning is critical to understanding agency, and meaning is irreducibly normative, no third-person, purely objective understanding of agency is possible; one must understand both the agent's culture and the agent himself as an individual from the "inside," not from any kind of external, third-person point of view.[2] This also led Herder to propose that we should understand human history as a succession of ways of life, or "cultures," whose standards for excellence and rightness are completely internal to themselves and which become expressed in the distinctive language of the culture; each such way of life represents a distinct type of human possibility and a different mode of collective and individual human excellence. No culture should therefore be judged by the standards inherent to another culture; each should be taken solely on its own terms.[3] Moreover, the defining mark of a "culture" or a people is its language (a notion that was to play a large role, in a manner completely unintended by Herder, in later nationalist movements), and the duty of poets, for example, is to refine that

[2] This reading of Herder's thought as arguing for the irreducibility of the normative is carried out by one of the best interpreters of Herder, Charles Taylor, in his "The Importance of Herder," in Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 79–99. Herder has also been interpreted as a naturalist (although, crucially, as rejecting mechanical explanations for organic nature and human agency in particular) by Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, ch. 5, pp. 127–164. Although Taylor's reading seems to me to be the better grounded of the two (and certainly accounts for the kind of influence Herder had on the Romantics and on Hegel), it would take us too far afield to argue for that here. To be fair, though, Herder, who is not always as rigorous in his arguments as one might like, often seems to want it both ways, that is, to argue for the irreducibility of the normative *and* for a naturalist account of mentality, thus leaving both lines of interpretation open. Some think that Herder's influence is the crucial influence on people like Hegel. In his widely (and deservedly) influential book, *Hegel*, Charles Taylor makes such a case. See Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge University Press, 1975). An even more emphatic case for Herder's influence is attempted by Michael Forster, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit* (University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[3] This was to have a profound influence on later historians, such as Leopold von Ranke, and on Hegel, although Hegel was decisively to reject the notion that we were confined to judging cultures purely in terms of their own standards, since Hegel argued we should understand them all as engaged in a progressive series of attempts at actualizing freedom.

language and to create the works of art that display that culture in its excellence.

Another of the great influences on the early Romantics was Friedrich Schiller, whose poetry and criticism (and his highly influential discussions of Kant's philosophy) shaped that entire generation; in particular, his overall notion that beauty was crucial to the cultivation of the moral life, since only beauty (on Schiller's view) could shape or evince the necessary harmony between sensibility and reason (that is, between inclination and duty) which can provide us with the crucial motivation for the moral life (and which, both to Schiller and many others, was somehow missing in Kant's own alleged "rigorism" regarding moral motivation). That beauty could be crucial to freedom and morality meant that the artist who creates a beautiful work contributes something decisive to the formation and education of humanity; this elevation of the artist as the "educator" of humanity without a doubt exercised a strong influence on the thought of the early Romantics. That Schiller himself was first at Jena, then later at Weimar (just a few miles away), also helped to bolster Schiller's influence on the early Romantics.

However, Herder's and Schiller's authority aside, the major influence on this group was the post-Kantian debate taking place in Jena itself, both at the university and in the journals of opinion (such as the *Allgemeine Literatur Zeitung*) located there. Fichte's influence was particularly important for this group, although it, too, can be overstated. To be sure, they took a good part of their inspiration from Fichte, but, for the most part, they hardly became Fichteans; indeed, what lent a certain common shape to their shared aspirations and programs had to do with the two ways in which they reacted to and rejected (or at least took themselves to be rejecting) Fichte's thought. (Schelling's own reaction to Fichte and his independent development of Romantic views was more obviously a major influence on this group, but Schelling requires a separate treatment.) Alienated from their surrounding world, they found that Fichte's emphasis on human spontaneity, on nothing "counting" for us unless we somehow bestowed some kind of status on it, exactly expressed their own feelings of estrangement from the world of their parents and their own desire to make their lives anew. On the other hand, they simply could not buy into what they saw as Fichte's one-sidedness, on "nothing" counting for us unless we somehow "posited it" or "made it" count; for them, there had to be some things that simply *counted* on their own, for us, without our having to *make* them count.

Although the "Kantian paradox" never played the obvious role for the early Romantics that it did for Fichte or for Hegel, it certainly was in the background of their works and thoughts, and many of the ideas found in their writings are obviously attempts to come to terms with it. This became expressed in two types of concerns. Their first great concern had to do with their tendency to want both sides of the Kantian coin. They learned the lesson from Fichte (and from Kant's third *Critique*) that we do not simply mirror the world in our descriptions of it; the world, that is, does not uniquely determine that we describe it or evoke it in one particular way or another. The way in which we describe or evoke the world is the result of human acts of spontaneity, indeed, even of creative, imaginative acts, and the early Romantics thereby tended to generalize Kant's views on aesthetic judgment to our encounters with ourselves and the world in general: we do not begin with a set of rules and then apply them to things; instead, we encounter particulars, and we then search for the concept that will subsume them, with that "search" being a creative endeavor guided by the imagination. Nonetheless, in those acts, we are also *responding to* the world, not just creating our descriptions of it without regard to the way the world really is. In particular, in aesthetic judgments (and experiences), we are getting at something deeper even than our own spontaneity, something that is, again in Kant's words, "neither nature nor freedom and yet is linked with the basis of freedom, the supersensible."[4] That is, we are neither simply imposing our own "form" on the world, nor simply taking in the raw data that the world offers us; we are, in a sense, doing both, imaginatively (and therefore freely) creating modes of description that nonetheless take their bearing from an experience of the way the world really is, even if that bearing cannot be given a final discursive, conceptual formulation. Fichte's own way of putting that issue – in terms of the "I" positing the "Not-I" – seemed to them to put too much emphasis on the "creative" side and not enough on the "responsive" aspect of experience, since Fichte's "absolute I" was the origin of all licensing and authorization, even for the "Not-I." The basic part of the Romantics' aspirations and their program formed around these two sets of issues: first, how we could hold two thoughts together – those of spontaneous creativity and responsiveness to the way the world really is – and, second, how we could integrate the unity of those two thoughts about spontaneity and responsiveness into Kant's own barely articulated idea in the *Critique of Judgment* that we are always oriented

[4] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §59.

by a prior, pre-conceptual understanding of a "whole" of nature and ourselves in order to assume our true human "vocation."

The second great concern of the early Romantics had to do with their intense sense of the need to develop and express their sense of individuality. The overwhelming sense of conformity in German society at the time – based largely on its patchwork, "hometown" nature, its economy of dependency, its ensuing provincialism – suppressed individuality; yet, as populations grew, and hopes went up, this same society could not provide the employment opportunities for these young people in the way that it was by its own lights supposed to provide. Their religion and the notions of the importance of individual feeling and sentiment in life (lessons both inherited from their religious faith and from the novels and essays coming in from France and Britain) only intensified their feeling of being suffocated by the overwhelming conformity of German life, of having to suppress their feelings (particularly erotic and amorous) in order to keep with the forms of the time, and of always being under scrutiny as to whether one had violated some outdated, unjustifiable social precept. Moreover, the sense of the crudeness of German culture, both in its official courtly forms and in its popular forms, only underlined their sense of alienation. This sense for individuality, which also drove them into explorations of subjective interiority, led them to be dissatisfied with both the Kantian and Fichtean accounts of subjectivity, which seemed to them too formal, too dry, to be insufficiently engaged with the messy, lived, existential character of human life. Much rhetoric that is now familiar to us (and has become a bit of a cliché itself) of "finding" oneself and of exploring one's feelings to get at what is truly oneself was created by the early Romantics as a vocabulary to express what it was that they were trying to accomplish and what they were rebelling against.

It would, though, be a mistake to write these things off as merely psychological, youthful reactions to generalized parental authority (although there are certainly elements of that in it). There was a deeper philosophical agenda and seriousness of purpose at work, even if that seriousness paradoxically expressed itself as irony and play. The desire to carve out a vocabulary in which individuality had a role to play – in which the individual's own good played just as much a role as did the "common goods" or "inherited goods" of one's surroundings – led them to rethink both key philosophical issues in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy and to fashion a theory of literature and society in which

their twin notions – of imaginative creativity and responsiveness to the world; and of the importance of valuing individuality both in one's own life and in collective social life – could be articulated and actualized.[5]

In particular, a kind of joint effort (that emerged from undocumented discussion among the members of the early Romantic group) emerged to give a better account of self-consciousness than either Kant or Fichte had offered. (This point was first articulated, one might even say "discovered," by Dieter Henrich and, following him, Manfred Frank.[6]) This was carried out by, among others, Schelling, Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), and Friedrich Hölderlin while they were at Jena attending Fichte's lectures. Among the early Romantic circle, there was both a fascination with Fichte's attempt to ground everything as normatively counting for us only in terms of its being "posited" by the "I," and a dissatisfaction with what they saw as the overly abstract nature of such an "I." Their emerging interest in individuality as a worthy category on its own led them to become more and more suspicious of the existential paucity of such an "I," and the way in which it also failed to capture the more basic experience of "responding" to the world (in particular, to nature) instead of "positing" norms for making judgments about it or acting on it. (More existentially minded thinkers such as Kierkegaard were later to take up this very point about the supposed lack of fit of idealist accounts of life with our more basic experiences of self and world.)

They seem to have been struck with the phenomenon of what philosophers now tend to call "criterionless self-ascription." In our awareness of ourselves, we ascribe experiences to ourselves without invoking any criteria for doing so, and this crucially distinguishes self-consciousness

[5] Richard Eldridge, Charles Larmore, Azade Seyhan, and Manfred Frank have been among the more forceful voices in stressing the early Romantics' dual commitment to imaginative creativity and responsiveness to the world. See Richard Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood: Philosophy, Literature, Criticism, and Self-Understanding* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Richard Eldridge, *Leading a Human Life: Wittgenstein, Intentionality, and Romanticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1997); Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Azade Seyhan, *Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*; Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

[6] This has been done in a variety of places, but the key representative books that espouse this position are: Dieter Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein: Untersuchungen zu Hölderlins Denken (1794–1795)* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1992); Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*; and *Selbstbewußtsein und Selbsterkenntnis* (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1991). Frank's path-breaking book, *Unendliche Annäherung*, brilliantly and carefully reconstructs just what those conversations must have been and who was influencing whom in that debate.

(at least in this sense) from our consciousness of other things. When we become aware, for example, that the fellow standing on the corner was the same fellow that was earlier in the bookstore, we use some type of criteria to identify him as the same man (looks, dress, and so on); but when I am aware that I have an experience (a pain, or a pleasure, and so on), I am aware that *I* have that experience as *my* experience without having to apply any such criteria at all. It is not as if one first notes that one has a pain and then looks around to see whose pain it is; one immediately, non-inferentially, without the use of any criteria, ascribes it to oneself. Taking their cue from Kant, the early Romantics also concluded that this form of self-consciousness was a condition for all consciousness, and that I could not be conscious of objects as distinct from my experience of them without also being able to perform those acts of immediate self-ascription. (In other words, I could not make the ordinary distinction between "seems to be" and "really is" without being able to say of some experience, "that's *my* experience.") Combining this with their other interests in creativity and responsiveness to nature (along with their interest in the expression and sustaining of true individuality), they concluded that neither Kant nor Fichte on their own terms could adequately account for that kind of self-consciousness and that, even more importantly, much more followed from the primacy of self-consciousness than either Kant or Fichte had seen.

The model of "reflection" which they took to be at work in both Kant's and Fichte's accounts – of the "I's" reflecting on itself in order to gain an awareness of itself – did not fit the way in which we are immediately aware of ourselves. The "I" as the subject of reflection could not identify itself with itself as the object of such reflection if it really were only a matter of *reflection*, of applying criteria. We do not, even could not, "reflect" on whether we were identical with ourselves in this most basic sense. For me to be aware of myself, I must distance myself from myself, make myself an "object" of my reflection; but in the sense that the same "I" is both doing the reflecting and is that which is reflected on presupposes a more direct acquaintance with the "I" that cannot itself be a matter of reflection. The circle at Jena making this argument did not wish to deny *all* reflective self-knowledge; they only wanted to claim that underlying all such ordinary reflective self-knowledge must be some kind of non-reflective, even pre-reflective self-knowledge, some way in which we are directly acquainted with ourselves that cannot be a matter of *identifying* via the application of some criteria our reflecting selves with the selves being reflected upon.

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: HÖLDERLIN

Interestingly, the most basic developments of this line of thought came from two people whose later fame was not for philosophical but for poetic achievements: Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich von Hardenberg (known by his literary name, Novalis).[7] Indeed, because of this fact and the fact that the other members of the "early Romantic" circle were by and large literary figures, "early Romanticism" has often been characterized, wrongly, as an exclusively literary movement in its inception.[8]

In 1795, Friedrich Hölderlin – born in 1770 and friends with both Hegel and Schelling, with whom he shared a room together at the Protestant Seminary in Tübingen – wrote out a two-page draft of some of these thoughts (at about the same time, Novalis was writing out a series of "Fichte studies" in his notebooks). In his piece (undiscovered until 1961 and labeled by his editors, "Judgment and Being"), Hölderlin noted that the sense of self involved in our acquaintance with ourselves should not be confused with an identity statement.[9] (Moreover, to get at the point which Hölderlin and the other early Romantics were trying to express, one must even try to avoid using such terms as "conscious of" or "aware of," since they bring with them the divisions of subject and object that the early Romantics took to presuppose already some more basic unity.) Prior to our reflective awareness of ourselves and even prior to our awareness of objects of experience (which always presupposes our making a distinction between those objects and our experience of them), there is an

[7] Manfred Frank also quite emphatically includes Schelling in this category, along with the great theologian, Schleiermacher, and the critic, Friedrich Schlegel. See Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, and *Eine Einführung in Schellings Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).

[8] Even the usually reliable Frederick Beiser, one of the most prominent intellectual historians of this period, makes this error: "German romanticism began as a literary movement. In its early period, its goals were primarily aesthetic, preoccupied with the need to determine the standards of good taste and literature." See his "introduction" to Frederick Beiser, *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. xii. The philosophical roots of the movement have been most deeply explored by Manfred Frank, first in *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* and then later in *Unendliche Annäherung*; the philosophical implications of the movement have been explored perhaps most thoroughly by Richard Eldridge, *On Moral Personhood*, and *Leading a Human Life*.

[9] "But how is self-consciousness possible? Only in that I oppose (*entgegensetze*) myself to myself, separate myself from myself, while still cognizing (*erkenne*) myself as the same (I) notwithstanding this separation. But to what extent as the same? I can, I must so ask; for from another point of view, it is opposed to itself. Thus identity is no unification of subject and object that has purely and simply taken place, thus identity is not = to absolute being," Friedrich Hölderlin, "Sein Urteil Möglichkeit," in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke (Frankfurter Ausgabe)*, vol. 17 (eds. D. E. Sattler, Michael Franz, and Hans Gerhard Steimer) (Basel: Roter Stern, 1991), pp. 147–156 (my translation).

"intellectual intuition" of "being" as something that "is" even prior to any statement of identity at all.[10] Prior to all other acts of judging, the human agent apprehends himself as *existing* as an individual, and this apprehension, as a criterionless self-ascription, is not just of his own individual existence but of "being" in general. This kind of "apprehension" thus cannot in principle be given any kind of propositional articulation, since all such articulation presupposes an act of judgment – which Hölderlin, playing on the German word for judgment, calls a "primordial division," an *Ur-Teilung* – and even any statement of identity, such as "A = A," supposes some kind of propositional articulation. Self-consciousness thus discloses something distinct from our consciousness of it and not reducible to it – one's own existence – that is nonetheless not a "thing" of any sort (not even a Kantian "thing-in-itself") and is not to be explained causally. One might partially explain one's perception of a tree, for example, by citing the way in which the various light beams strike the retina and thereby "cause" (or causally contribute to) the perception of a tree; the tree exists outside of one's consciousness, and it (or, rather, the light beams bouncing off it) "causes" the consciousness of itself. One's own existence, however, does not in any sense "cause" one's consciousness of things; as that which is disclosed in immediate self-ascription of experiences, it is a condition of self-consciousness, which is itself a condition of all consciousness of objects.

Since this apprehension, this mode of "intellectual intuition" cannot itself be judgmentally or propositionally articulated, it can only be indirectly hinted at through the careful use of metaphor to evoke this apprehension without directly expressing it (or, to appropriate a familiar metaphor from Wittgenstein: to "show" it without being able to "say" it). This mode of indirectly indicating is, of course, the realm of art. The artist – and for Hölderlin and Novalis, particularly the poet – evokes this awareness of the "being" of the world and our own existence in the world in terms of our own temporally drawn out modes of existence. All our other judgmental activities take their orientation from this sense of the "one and all" in which we immediately find ourselves placed (and do not "place," or "posit" ourselves). In this respect, the early Romantics were responding in their own way to the ongoing and still heated debate over Spinoza. In his days in Tübingen with Schelling and Hegel, Hölderlin

[10] Friedrich Hölderlin, "Sein Urteil Möglichkeit": "Where subject and object are purely and simply (*schlechthin*) and not only in part united, united together so that no division can be carried out without violating the essence of that which is separated, there and nowhere else can we speak of Being purely and simply, as is the case with intellectual intuition."

himself had obviously toyed with, if not fully identified with, some form of Spinozism. The Greek phrase, "*hen kai pan*," the "one and all" – the very phrase supposedly used by Lessing (according to Jacobi) to characterize his own thought – was shared among the three friends in Tübingen. By 1795, the "one and all," though, was for him to be conceived not as an underlying monistic substance but as "being" itself that "disclosed" itself to us in myriad ways. We "respond" creatively to being, allowing ourselves to be led by it in shaping our responses to it, but it is the imagination that shapes those responses.

In one key sense, Hölderlin and the early Romantics accepted Kant's strictures on the limits of reason and his view that reason's efforts to go beyond the boundaries of possible experience were all illegitimate, but they thought that this restriction had to do with the nature of self-consciousness as a non-propositional intuition of the existing ground of consciousness and not with the more logically oriented, transcendental conditions of experience for which Kant had argued. For Kant, we must perceive things in space and time because that is the only way our own minds can "receive" things-in-themselves; reason cannot show that things must in themselves be spatial or temporal. In the Romantics' thought, Kant's "things-in-themselves," however, were transformed into "being-in-itself." They refused to draw Kant's own conclusion that we must therefore remain completely silent about those things of which reason cannot speak. Instead, they took self-consciousness to be the "disclosure" of (using Kant's words against him) that which is "neither nature nor freedom and yet is linked with the basis of freedom, the supersensible." Such "disclosure" must be something more like Kant's notion of aesthetic experience, with the "indeterminate substrate" of nature and freedom prompting us to take an interest in it, and, more importantly, providing us with a sense of the "whole" in terms of which we could orient our lives and about which we can speak only indirectly at best. This, of course, led them to conceive of nature as not quite the mechanical, Newtonian system that Kant (at least in the first *Critique*) had taken it to be, but as an even more teleologically structured "organic" whole than Kant would have countenanced, and it led them to a reconsideration of what art, and particularly poetry, might accomplish. Kant's realism about the independent existence of things-in-themselves and his insistence on the limits of reason were thus given a wholly new twist.

Hölderlin's critique of Fichte in "Judgment and Being" amounted to the charge that by trying to give an account of "objectivity" in terms of an account of subjects "positing" things, Fichte had already stacked the

deck in favor of a subjective, even "psychological" idealism. Subjectivity and objectivity emerge together; it would be only different forms of dogmatism to assert that one constructs an account of one out of the other. In Fichte's own case, "subjectivity" came first, and he was then stuck with the (impossible) task of showing how "objectivity" arose out of it. In fact, we must always begin with a pre-reflective sense of ourselves as "in" the world (as part of "being"), and that sense is more basic than any articulation of ourselves as "subjects" and "objects." Skeptical worries about whether our subjective thoughts match up with objective facts is completely derivative from this necessarily pre-supposed pre-reflective sense of "being," of our own *existence* in the world as part of it. Skepticism about what really "counts" for us does indeed emerge, but always and only against the backdrop of a sense of "being" that is more basic than the notions of subjectivity and objectivity themselves.

Hölderlin used his poetry to work out a complex conception of the way in which we imaginatively and creatively respond to the conflicting tendencies in our self-conscious lives that arise out of this elemental nature of self-consciousness.[11] Since all consciousness requires a judgmental articulation of this pre-reflective unity of "being" – again, a primordial division of that which is originally undivided – we are, as it were, intuitively aware of this unity of "being" in our consciousness of the world, and it remains a presence in our conscious lives, holding out the promise of a restored unity of the divisions that occur as necessary conditions of our leading self-conscious lives at all. In apprehensions of beauty we get an inkling of what that unity might be like as the "supersensible" ground of both nature and freedom, and such apprehensions of beauty prompt us to take an interest in those things that can matter to us in holding our lives together, matters to which we might otherwise be blind. As Hölderlin puts it in one of his most famous poems, "Bread and Wine" (1800), using the metaphor of gods appearing among men (in literal prose translation): "This the heavenly tolerate as far as they can; but then they appear in truth, in person, and men grow used to good fortune, to Day, and to the sight of these now manifest, the countenances of those who, long ago called the One and All, deeply had filled the taciturn heart with free self-content . . . Such is man; when the wealth is at hand, and a god in person provides him with gifts, he neither knows nor sees it."[12]

[11] Dieter Henrich is the founder of this line of interpretation of Hölderlin's mature poetic works. See Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein*; and Dieter Henrich, *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin* (ed. Eckart Förster) (Stanford University Press, 1997).

[12] "Möglichst dulden die Himmlischen dies; dann aber in Wahrheit / Kommen sie selbst, und gewohnt werden die Menschen der Glücks / Und des Tags und zu schaun die Offenbaren,

For Hölderlin, the kind of accord with oneself that is hinted at in our apprehension of the ground of consciousness in "being" is, however, to be attained only in fits and starts throughout life and in the balancing of the kinds of inevitable conflicts within life that come about because of the irreconcilability of the fundamental directions in human life. One seeks a balance in these things since we are pulled in so many different directions, but no ultimate resolution of those discordances in one life is possible. We seek to be at one with the world, to be "at home" in it, yet we are also necessarily distanced from that world, never quite able to fully identify with our place in it. Only two experiences provide the insight necessary for us to come to terms with life and to achieve a unity or harmony with oneself that is possible for the kind of divided agents we are.[13] Love existentially solves the problem of how to unite spontaneity and responsiveness in that in it there is awareness and recognition of both unity and difference, a recognition of each other as uniquely existing individuals in a unity with each other; indeed, love can exist only where there is a full responsiveness to the independent and full reality of the other which is at the same time a liberation, a feeling of complete autonomy. The apprehension of beauty, best mediated by the poet, also unites what would otherwise be only fragmented pieces of nature or our temporally extended lives. This awareness of the "one," of "being," which is "disclosed" by self-consciousness, is our point of orientation as we seek to maintain a balance and harmony throughout the conflicting tendencies of life, and this, so Hölderlin thought, is the basis for what truth there is in the religious impulse.[14]

Like so many other compatriots, Hölderlin was himself originally quite taken with the French Revolution, and he came to believe that modernity, the new age, which he hoped would be a time of both spiritual and political renewal, required a radically new sensibility to bring about the kind of awareness of "unity in conflict" that he sought to express in his

das Antlitz / Derer, welche, schon längst Eines und Alles genannt, / Tief die verschwiegene Brust mit freier Genüge gefüllet, . . . / So ist der Mensch; wenn da ist das Gut, und es sorget mit Gaben / Selber ein Gott für ihn, kennet und sieht er es nicht." From *Hölderlin* (ed., trans., and introduced by Michael Hamburger) (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 109.

[13] The love of which Hölderlin speaks was, of course, drawn from his own experience of his passionate and doomed affair with Susette Gontard, for whose children Hölderlin had been hired by her husband, Jacob Gontard, as a house-tutor, and, most likely, also his close attachment to the friends of his youth, particularly Hegel and Schelling. See David Constantine, *Hölderlin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) for a general account of his life and works.

[14] Dieter Henrich speaks of Hölderlin's characterization of "conflicting tendencies" in life, and, in his interpretation, Hölderlin distinguishes three such "tendencies": the striving for unity and perfection in life; the apprehension of beauty as that which prompts you to various forms of awareness or action; and the apprehension of the common ground of being. See Henrich, *Der Grund im Bewußtsein*, and *The Course of Remembrance and Other Essays on Hölderlin*.

poems; to that end, he crafted a highly original set of metaphors, combining Greek and Christian religious imagery and inventing an imaginary landscape in which Northern Europe, Greece, and the Middle East all merged. The purpose of such startling imagery was to prompt reflection and awareness of the possible, hinted unity of life within the conflicts of individuality; and, as he put it in the final line of his 1803 poem, *Andenken* (*Remembrance*): "But what is lasting the poets provide."[15]

THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS: NOVALIS

Perhaps not surprisingly, the other thinker besides Hölderlin who developed this line of thought about self-consciousness and "being" also ceased to be a philosopher and found his calling as a poet: Friedrich von Hardenberg, known by his adopted pen-name, Novalis. (Both of them were also working on poetry simultaneously with their philosophical studies.) Both left the scene quite early: Novalis (1772–1801) died young, and Hölderlin (1770–1843) succumbed to schizophrenia, which effectively ended his literary career by around 1804–1806. (It is only fruitless speculation to wonder whether either would have returned to philosophical writing had his literary career not been cut short.)

Novalis was a polymath by temperament, studied law and philosophy at the university (he even apparently dabbled in alchemy), and then went to the Freiberg mining academy to study mining technology, chemistry, and mathematics. In 1799, he began a career as a director of the salt mines (in which he earlier worked as an assistant) in his native Saxony. (Indeed, Novalis, ever the autodidact, dabbled in just about everything.)

In 1795, while deep into his studies of Fichte, he met and became secretly engaged to the twelve-year-old Sophie von Kühn, who was to die only two years later. Novalis was devastated by Sophie's death and composed one of his most famous and haunting set of poems having to do with his visits to her grave and his meditations on her life and death, *Hymns to the Night*, published in the *Athenäum* in 1800, in which he lyrically evoked the early Romantic themes of the way love unites without at the same time swallowing individuals, and he used the image of daylight to evoke the differences between consciousness (of different objects in the light), and of the apprehension of the "being" that underlies self-consciousness (in the image of the night in which the differences among

[15] "Was bleibt aber, stiften die Dichter." From *Hölderlin* (ed., trans., and introduced by Michael Hamburger), p. 211.

visible things are obliterated, giving us a glimpse of the "one and all"). The "night" also evoked death and the necessity of recognizing in it the finitude of temporal human life and the ways such finitude makes us into the finite, self-conscious agents we are. Like Hölderlin, he merged Greek and Christian symbolism into the poems, but, unlike Hölderlin, he imagined in them something like a Christian overcoming of death, a final calling to our divine home.

Kant had said that "reason" necessarily seeks the "unconditioned" and also necessarily fails to find it. Playing on this, Novalis quipped: "Everywhere we *seek* the unconditioned (*das Unbedingte*), and we find only things (*Dinge*)," punning on the German words for "condition" and "thing."[16] Like Hölderlin, he thought that self-consciousness discloses the "unconditioned" – our own individual existence as itself a disclosure of "being" in general – and poetry paradigmatically provides the only kind of indirect way of expressing and communicating that disclosure.

Novalis took this, however, in a quite different direction from Hölderlin in his own poetry and philosophical speculations; like Hölderlin's own effort, Novalis's own attempts at working out the philosophy of self-consciousness (contained mostly in his notebooks for his studies on Fichte in 1795) remain only fragmentary studies. Like Hölderlin, he understood there to be a fundamental form of self-apprehension that was not relational, which, in turn, gave rise to a form of self-consciousness that was explicitly relational: "The I must be divided in order for the I to be – only the impulse to be the I unifies it – the unconditioned ideal of the pure I is thus characteristic of the I in general."[17] However, unlike Hölderlin, who thought of self-conscious life as necessarily embodying within itself competing directions and claims, which could only be delicately held in balance by love and the apprehension of beauty, Novalis came to think that the kind of existence, or "being," that is disclosed in self-consciousness remains, as it were, forever out of our reach because of the kind of temporal creatures we are.[18] Our apprehension of the "being" that our own existence discloses always remains something in the past not now fully accessible; as something to be achieved in the future and thus also not now fully accessible; and in the present, our sense of our own existence remains problematic precisely because of our temporality,

[16] Friedrich von Hardenberg, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe* (hereafter *WTB*) (eds. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel) (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1978), vol. 2, *Novalis: Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*, p. 227; part of *Blütenstaub 1797/98* ("Pollen 1797/98"). Quite literally: "Everywhere we seek the un-thing-ifed (unconditioned), and we find only things."

[17] Hardenberg, *WTB*, III, p. 127. Cited in Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, p. 849.

[18] See the very subtle and insightful discussion of this theme in Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*.

the way in which our consciousness is always stretched out between past, present, and future. Being the contingent, temporal creatures we are, we search (necessarily, so Novalis seemed to think) as Fichte did for an absolute foundation for our lives – for our empirical, religious, moral, and aesthetic judgments – only always to find such a ground continually receding from us.

Like some of the other early Romantics, Novalis preferred the aphorism and the collection of fragmentary observations to the more scholarly, "scientific" presentations of Fichte or Schelling.[19] This was also in keeping with his own views about the necessary incompleteness of human existence as it is lived out: since the ground that we necessarily seek is always receding, always out of reach (even though we always have an intimation of it), we are constantly seeking to "pin down" that contingent, open-ended existence – what he calls a "striving for rest – but just for all that, an infinite striving as long as the subject does not become the pure I – which does not happen as long as the I remains I."[20] The philosophical urges for system and for "foundations" are thus rooted in the nature of contingent, human temporal agency itself. Faced with the groundless contingency of our lives, we find in the intellectual intuition of the "being" that is the "ground" of our existence an image of a kind of resting place within our own lives, a kind of "home" in which the choices about our existence are already made for us and do not need to find their foundation in our own choices and resoluteness about things.

Novalis thereby came to conceive of the central issue in our temporal existence as that of *authenticity*, of how to be true to ourselves as the kind of open-ended temporally existing creatures we are, and of how to be true to the fact that the choices we make about *who* we are to be are themselves choices based on fully contingent matters, that are not only themselves *not* objects of choice but whose very nature is necessarily obscured from our view. For the most part, we live only in "everyday life," as he calls it, which "consists of nothing but life-sustaining tasks which recur again and again. The inauthentic life is lived by the "philistines" who "live only an everyday life. The principal means seems their only purpose . . . They

[19] For strong contrasts in the reading of Novalis, compare Frank's account in *Unendliche Annäherung* (which is philosophically interesting on its own independently of whether its claims are true of Novalis) and that of Jean-Louis Viellard-Baron, *Hegel et L'Idéalisme Allemand* (Paris: Vrin, 1999). Viellard-Baron reads Novalis as vindicating the claims of the "image" against the Hegelian "concept," seeing Novalis as a kind of mystical, enchanted thinker intent on noting how the microcosm of human experience mirrors within itself the macrocosm of the universe. He notes: "To become the microcosm for man is to become Christ, or, more precisely, the cosmic Christ; to become Christ is to find in the cosmos his own image reflected as in a mirror," p. 134.

[20] Hardenberg, *WTB*, III, p. 850.

mix poetry with it only in case of *necessity*, simply because they are used to a certain interruption of their daily habits."[21] The opposite of being such a "philistine," sustaining a mechanical repetition of everyday habits, is to be an *authentic* person, someone living outside of the "commonplace" or someone who has subjectively transformed the "commonplace" into something magical. (As he put it: "Do we perhaps need so much energy and effort for ordinary and common things because for an authentic human being nothing is more out of the ordinary – nothing more common than wretched ordinariness?"[22])

Novalis interpreted the philosophical search for system and for a "final grounding," a "first principle" as only a symptom of this quest for a "home," for something that would pin down our existence and give us a direction without our having actively to orient ourselves by it. This desire for "system" in philosophy is thus itself a form of pathology, a "logical illness" as Novalis calls it: "Philosophy is actually homesickness – the urge to be everywhere at home."[23] Such a search to be "everywhere at home" can only be another form of inauthenticity, another way of seeking some fixed point in oneself or the world that would supposedly anchor the inherent unrest of human existence.

There were only two cures for this "logical illness," so Novalis thought: one was imaginative poetry, *Poesie*; the other was simply the refusal to systematize everything by philosophizing through the use of the fragment and the epigram, and, quite importantly, by philosophizing in conversation with others, as "symphilosophy" (sympathetic communal philosophizing). (The term was coined by Friedrich Schlegel.) Fragmentary "symphilosophy" and poetry together work against such inauthenticity in that they both seek to "romanticize" the world, which Novalis characterized in the following manner: "Romanticizing is nothing other than a qualitative raising to a higher power. The lower self is identified with a better self in this operation. This operation is as yet quite unknown. By giving a higher meaning to the ordinary, a mysterious appearance

[21] *Novalis: Philosophical Writings* (ed. and trans. Margaret Mahony Stoljar) (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), no. 76, p. 37; *WTB*, II, p. 262.

[22] *Ibid.*, no. 12, p. 24; *WTB*, II, p. 230.

[23] *Ibid.*, no. 45, p. 135. Compare also no. 33, p. 131: "PHILOSOPHICAL PATHOLOGY. An absolute drive toward perfection and completeness is an illness, as soon as it shows itself to be destructive and averse toward the *imperfect*, the incomplete." Novalis also says of those who wish to fix the contingency of subjectivity either in the subject or the object: "Both are logical illnesses – kinds of delusion – in which nonetheless the ideal is revealed or reflected in two ways" pp. 131–132. Nietzsche later remarked of the philosophical quest for a non-perspectival point of view that it is part of the "ascetic ideal," which in essence is the "incarnate wish for being otherwise, being elsewhere . . . " Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe) (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 93.

to the ordinary, the dignity of the unacquainted to that of which we are acquainted, the mere appearance of infinity to finite, I romanticize them."[24] For Novalis, romanticizing thus involves poetically redescribing the world so that our own existence – fragmentary, incomplete, and unable to be fully articulated – is better disclosed to us for what it is, and we are thereby able to live out our lives as more meaningful and more self-directed, all the while remaining responsive to the world in itself, all of which is accomplished by attending to the beautiful in nature and art. Novalis thus embodied the twin commitments of early Romantic theory in an intense, although highly aestheticized, manner: we have to be responsive to the world (or "being," as he would say), but our responses must be creative, even be works of art themselves; as he put it, "life must not be a novel that is given to us, but one that is made by us."[25]

Novalis became engaged again in 1798 and in 1799 began his career as a supervisor in the salt-mining industry. However, like so many of the Romantic generation in Germany and England, Novalis died young, succumbing in 1801 to tuberculosis, and the wedding never took place. Hegel, who knew him in Jena, scornfully characterized him in his *Phenomenology* as the quintessential "beautiful soul," whose "light dies away within it, and it vanishes like a shapeless vapor that dissolves into thin air."[26] The members of the Jena circle, however, continued to champion Novalis's literary work long after his death, even long after the circle itself had broken up, although his posthumous fame rested almost solely on his poetic works. His philosophical works have only recently come to be appreciated both as original pieces and as shards of evidence for the argument about self-consciousness that was emerging in Jena at the time but which was never expressed fully in published form.

SCHLEIERMACHER: ROMANTIC RELIGION AND THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF INDIVIDUALITY

Besides Schelling, the greatest of the Romantic thinkers in the Berlin/Jena circles was clearly Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher, whose own renown has always been as a theologian. However, his 1799 book, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, proved to be epochal for the

[24] Hardenberg, *WTB*, II, no. 105, p. 334 ("qualitative raising to a higher power" renders "*qualitative Potenzierung*").

[25] *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, no. 99, p. 66.

[26] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A. V. Miller) (Oxford University Press, 1977), para. 658, p. 400; *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (eds. Hans Friedrich Wessels and Heinrich Clairmont) (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), pp. 432–433.

development of Romantic thought and provided one of the most eloquent and consistent expressions of its twin themes of the irreducibility of individuality and the necessity of holding together in one thought the idea of our own creativity in the use of language and our responsiveness to a reality independent of us, all mixed together with an emphasis on the "aesthetic" dimension of human experience as disclosing something existentially and philosophically profound to us.[27]

Although he shared virtually all of the views that led people like Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel to prefer the "fragment" to the systematic treatise, Schleiermacher was not nearly as disinclined to systematic treatises as they were. Nonetheless, his significant early works were written as "speeches" or "monologues" or "confidential letters" rather than as drawn-out, scholarly works, and, perhaps even more intensely than Novalis's or Schlegel's works, Schleiermacher's early works express the gnawing sense of alienation and the generational rupture experienced by that group born around 1770. Running throughout all the early Romantics' writings – and in Schleiermacher's writings all the more so – is an intense dissatisfaction with German Protestant Christianity as being little more than a fragmented, lifeless ecclesiastical bureaucracy far more interested in enforcing small details about doctrine than in pursuing any kind of truth. Inspired as it had been by Rousseau's and Jacobi's articulations of the importance of the emotions in *individual* life, that generation focused more and more on its own gnawing doubts about whether Christianity at its heart really *is* a living religion, whether it even *could* be reformed into a living religion, or whether it is doomed forever to be only a "positive" (as the popular term of the day had it) religion of orthodoxy and bureaucracy. (For example, completely independently of the early Romantic circle and in another place, Hegel, in the late 1790s, was busily churning out unpublished treatises on the "positivity" versus the "spirit" of Christianity and the need for a "subjective religion.")

Schleiermacher himself was raised in the famous pietist Christian community of the Herrnhut in Moravia. The Pietists were profoundly suspicious of the intellectual articulations of Christianity dominant in the seminaries; what was at stake in Christian religion, for them, was the pure *feeling* of God's presence in the hearts of the believers. This openness

[27] F. D. A. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (ed. and trans. Richard Crouter) (Cambridge University Press, 1988; *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1958). There are numerous scholarly disputes about the relation between this book and Schleiermacher's later work on Christian faith as professor of theology at Berlin, which I shall simply sidestep here.

to God in one's hearts, in turn, produces a transformative effect on the faithful, and that, in turn, leads to an outward orientation to reforming society by bringing it more in line with Christian ideals. (Pietists in fact founded orphanages, hospitals, and did other such "good works.") Faith and feeling and commitment to reform the world, not dry orthodoxy and overly intellectualized theology, were thus the hallmarks of Pietism. As a young man, however, Schleiermacher went through a crisis of faith – as with many young intellectuals of this period, his crisis was instigated by a reading of Kant's works – and he rejected all the pietist claims and arguments in favor of reason, only to regain his faith later in his twenties and pursue his theological studies. Like almost all of his contemporaries, he at first could not find suitable employment and had to content himself with being a house-tutor for a well-to-do family from 1790 to 1793, only managing to get a preacher's job somewhat later. In 1796, while serving as a chaplain at the Charité hospital in Berlin, he became acquainted with Friedrich Schlegel and the Romantic circle by attending some of the famous salons of Berlin at that time that were run by Berlin's prominent Jewish families.

On Religion was the outcome of his conversations and engagement with the Jena/Berlin circles. In some ways, Schleiermacher's thought, like that of so many of the early Romantics, took as its jumping-off points both Kant's claim in the *Critique of Judgment* that aesthetic judgments are oriented by the Idea of the "supersensible substrate" of nature and freedom, and Jacobi's idea that only in "feeling" are we in contact with the "unconditioned" that Kant said reason only vainly sought. Whereas Kant, in his own words, wanted to "deny *knowledge*, in order to make room *for faith*," Schleiermacher and his fellow Romantics (under the influence of Jacobi) seemed to want to deny (or limit) knowledge in order to make room for *mystery*, for a re-enchanted view of the world.[28] Religion, Schleiermacher said, was based neither on morals (as Kant and Fichte would have had it) nor on metaphysics (as the defenders of orthodoxy would have it) but "breathes there where freedom itself has once more become nature."[29] It "breathes," that is, where Spinozism flourishes, where the "one and all" (Schleiermacher's term), the "infinite nature of totality" is taken up by human agents in "quiet submissiveness," that is, in some kind of reception of and responsiveness to the "one and all," to what Novalis and Hölderlin had simply called "being."[30]

[28] See *Critique of Pure Reason*, BXXX. [29] *On Religion*, p. 23; *Über die Religion*, p. 29.

[30] *On Religion*, p. 23; *Über die Religion*, p. 29. ("Submissiveness" renders "*Ergebenheit.*") After 1822, Schleiermacher was to characterize this feeling of submissiveness as the feeling of "pure

Religion thus begins in the kind of self-apprehension of which Hölderlin and Novalis had spoken. Its mode of apprehension of this "one and all" is that of "intuition"; religion for Schleiermacher is thus a matter of the way the individual fundamentally *sees* the world, of the "picture" he has of it, how he, as Schleiermacher himself puts it, "intuits" it. Since this "intuition" is a "view," a "picture" of where one does and even *must* stand in the greater scheme of things, it determines one's ultimate standards of evaluation for belief, action, or appreciation. One cannot thereby be argued either *into* or *out* of such a view, since the nature of that fundamental view is ultimately a practical, even existential matter of the kind of person one *is* and *must be*, not of the kinds of arguments one can muster for certain conclusions.[31]

One's basic "intuition" of the "one and all" must therefore be highly individual, even unique, in its contours, since it is the manner by which one grasps the sense of one's own existence as having its possibility only in terms of the larger sense of "being" that forms the horizon against which it is disclosed. It is the way in which a contingent, historically situated individual apprehends his basic stance to the universe, his place in the larger scheme of things. As such a contingent individual, one has an "intuition" of the "infinite," of the "one and all" (of that which is inherently self-contained and unbounded), and one's own intuition introduces necessarily a kind of boundedness and delimitation into something that cannot be fully identified with that very individual way of grasping it and shaping one's response to it in one's imagination. Since, as Schleiermacher notes, it is a matter of logic that one must distinguish the ways in which concepts are subsumed under other, more general concepts – such as the way in which the concepts of "dog" and "cat" are subsumed under the concept, "animal" – and the way in which individuals instantiate certain concepts – the way in which we say of the individual, Schleiermacher, that he was a theologian – Schleiermacher concludes that we must admit that *being* an individual cannot therefore be fully exhausted by an enumeration of the various concepts that describe or "subsume" the individual.[32]

dependence" (*schlechthinnige Abhängigkeit*). Hegel was later and infamously to use this to claim that Schleiermacher's conception of faith as dependence could not distinguish the feeling of faith from a dog's happiness at getting a bone from its master. See Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, pp. 685ff.

[31] See *On Religion*, p. 23; *Über die Religion*, p. 29: "Religion apprehends man . . . from the vantage point where he must be what he is, whether he likes it or not."

[32] *On Religion*, p. 102; *Über die Religion*, p. 142. Schleiermacher draws on the distinction between class inclusion and class membership to make this point. As he puts it in his text: "If we divide a concept as much as we want and continue ad infinitum, we still never arrive at individuals

Orthodoxy, on the other hand, wishes to impose a doctrinal standard on these intuitions, to group them under pre-determined categories and to exclude those that cannot be so grouped. The ultimately individual nature of such "intuitions," however, makes them impossible to be so ordered. Orthodoxy, therefore, cannot really claim to be *religion* – it may be socially efficacious, but it is not *religion*. For that reason, Schleiermacher argues, church and state (which requires uniformity of law) must be kept separate *for the sake of* religion. In fact, all forms of sectarianism, religious or otherwise, work against true "religion" in this sense. In that light, even all systematic philosophical views are "sectarian": they proceed ultimately from different principles and different "intuitions" of the world. To impose a philosophical system on a people or to use any one philosophical system to provide the "foundations" for religion (whether the system be Kantian, utilitarian, rationalist, or empiricist) must therefore be misguided and can only falsify the inherent ambiguity and uniqueness of the religious experience itself.

This fundamental, core "intuition" of the universe forms the basic background against which one fashions the most central set of words and expressions of authoritative norms that one uses to evaluate oneself and others. This is not, however, a purely intellectual process; one's basic "intuition" (or "view") of one's place in the greater scheme of things is as much conveyed by one's emotional orientation to this whole as it is by any thoughts one might have of it, and (as Reinhold had argued) such basic orientations rest on certain basic building blocks. "Every intuition," Schleiermacher insisted, "is, by its very nature, connected with a feeling," and "if a determinate religion is not supposed to begin with a fact, it cannot begin at all; for there must be a basis, and it can only be a subjective one for why something is brought forth and placed in the center."[33] This "fact," however, is a subjective "sense," more or less, that "this is how I *must* stand with regard to the greater scheme of things" and that the rest of one's orientation to life emerges out of one's *responsiveness* to that basic "fact."

Since there is no getting behind these core intuitions, and since they form the unique way in which an individual sees how he must stand toward the world, there must also be a plurality of such intuitions and therefore necessarily also a plurality of *religions*. The crucial, fundamental mistake in thinking about religion, Schleiermacher argues, is to fail to

by this means but only at less universal concepts that are contained under earlier concepts as divisions and subdivisions."

[33] *On Religion*, p. 29, p. 110; *Über die Religion*, pp. 37, 154 ("Fact" renders "*Faktum*").

realize the necessity of this plurality and to attempt to impose some uniformity on religion. Although one can draw various logical conclusions from such basic intuitions, one cannot logically move from one basic intuition (or basic evaluative language) to another; there simply are no inferential links between any one such basic intuition and another, nor can there be any way of comparing any one such basic "intuition" to another, since the terms of comparison themselves are rooted in a unique basic intuition, and there are no terms that span all of them, no neutral framework in which one can impartially frame the other's basic concerns and norms. (These days we would say that such "intuitions" are therefore "incommensurable.")

To find appealing another's "intuition" (or his articulation of it) is only to discover that it expresses better than some alternative one's own apprehension of where one must be in the grander scheme of things; or, in Schleiermacher's own preferred terminology, "there is no determinate inner connection between the various intuitions and feelings of the universe . . . each individual intuition and feeling exists for itself and can lead to every other one through a thousand accidental connections."[34] Because of the sheer contingency of such intuitions, the only appropriate exhibition of the real essence of religion must therefore be fragmentary, and any systematic theoretical presentation (either theological or philosophical) can only distort what is really at stake in religious experience. The appropriate literary mode of expression for this therefore had to be something like the frank exchange of "letters" to a "friend" or even "monologues" (Schleiermacher tried both of these forms), something that expressed an individual's deeply felt "take" on things as communicated to somebody who already shared enough of that "take" to be able to understand it or at least to be open to it. Neither the Kantian nor the Fichtean critical treatise could suffice.

Like Kant's "ethical commonwealth" in which people can only enter freely (unlike the societal commonwealth into which people can be coerced), Schleiermacher's "true church" is simply a "religious community" of free agents, who "rejoice in their community, in their pure fellowship in which they would exhibit and communicate only their innermost existence, actually have nothing in common whose possession would have to be protected for them by a worldly power."[35] Such a community of believers formed the only possible "home" for the alienated

[34] *On Religion*, p. 101; *Über die Religion*, p. 140.

[35] *On Religion*, p. 88; *Über die Religion*, pp. 120–121 ("Fellowship" translates "*Geselligkeit*" and "existence" translates "*Dasein*").

actors of the modern world, and it was crucial to preserve this "home" from the natural desire to extend it and impose it on others – as Schleiermacher put the matter: "the zeal about the extension of religion is only the pious longing of the stranger for home, the endeavor to carry one's fatherland with one and everywhere to intuit its laws and customs."[36] For Schleiermacher (as for the other early Romantics), the desire to be "at home" should not be construed as sanctioning the imposition of some kind of orthodoxy of belief on those who cannot share one's ideals; the true "home" is in the free religious community and the acknowledgement of the necessary plurality of religions. (Schleiermacher would have fully agreed with Wordsworth's formulation in his 1805 *Prelude*, "Our destiny, our nature, and our home / Is with infinitude, and only there – ."[37])

This, of course, raised the question for Schleiermacher (as it did for all the early Romantics) about the status of Christianity. All of the early Romantics, Schleiermacher included, were ambivalent about Christian religion (at least in their youth). Like the good Pietists many of them had been, they wanted a new reformation of the Christian Church accompanied by a social and political reformation of the world around them; but they distrusted the existing churches, and they toyed with the idea of importing Eastern religions or even founding a new, more spiritual religion to replace Christianity. Schleiermacher's own rather relativistic conclusions about religion – that because of the uniqueness of each individual, there must necessarily be a plurality of religions, which, in turn, it would be wrong to suppress – seemed to invite the obvious conclusion that Christianity was just one religion among many, one way of viewing how people had to stand to the "infinite" that they so vaguely sensed. Schleiermacher himself even went so far as to claim that the whole idea of having an authorized "Bible" was itself contradictory to the spirit of true religion.

Nonetheless, Schleiermacher balked at the idea that Christianity was only one religion among many on the infinite menu of religious experience. Instead, borrowing a term from Schelling, he argued that Christianity was a higher "power" (*Potenz*) of religion, a kind of meta-religion, as it were, a religion of religion. The central "intuition" of Christianity, he claimed, was the view that, since the claims of religion in general must always be embodied in the actions and decisions of flesh-and-blood people, religion is always in the process of degenerating and recomposing

[36] *On Religion*, p. 78; *Über die Religion*, p. 106.

[37] William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (ed. Jonathan Wordsworth) (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 240 (6: 538–539).

itself. Contingent, historically limited people will always be tempted to interpret their own view of the greater scheme of things as the only possible view, to persecute those who have differing "intuitions" as heretics, and to abuse the offices of whatever church then gets established. Thus, the fundamental religious experience for Christians is that of "holy sadness [which] accompanies every joy and every pain" that is attendant on both the religious experience and the realization that whatever its status, it too must fall prey to corruption, to the realization that we are all "sinners."[38] (Schleiermacher's conception of sin obviously draws from and romanticizes Kant's notion of radical evil.) Thus, Christianity can claim a higher status than other religions, particularly in comparison with Judaism, which Schleiermacher claimed (in keeping with the widespread belief among Christians of his time) had long since become a dead religion, a faith that consisted only of orthodoxy and the dead hand of tradition. (Schleiermacher later became a proponent of Jewish civil and political emancipation and called for a new form of reformed Judaism; in 1799, though, he was still relatively hostile to Judaism, even when he faintly praised it for its "beautiful, childlike character."[39] Like Kant, he also thought at the time that there was no deep connection between Judaism and Christianity, and that Judaism had actually ceased to be a religion at all, having degenerated into a set of legalistic formalities and ethnic ties.)

These views eventually drove Schleiermacher into pressing even deeper into issues of interpretation and meaning. Clearly, if the various "intuitions" were incommensurable – especially if understanding a religious intuition meant sharing the same form of life as others who had that intuition – then it became very unclear just how we were to understand what people actually *meant* when they claimed that they had this or that religious sense. This led Schleiermacher in his later years to generalize the religious discipline of hermeneutics – the theory of how to interpret the Bible – into a more inclusive theory of interpretation (nowadays known simply as "hermeneutics" and lacking all its religious connotations). The key formula of Schleiermacher's later hermeneutics expressed what has since come to be known as the "hermeneutic circle": to understand an individual utterance, I must understand the whole in which it is embedded (such as the language and the culture of the speaker), and, to understand that whole, I must understand its parts (the individual utterances). The interplay of whole and part is absolutely

[38] *On Religion*, p. 119; *Über die Religion*, p. 167. [39] *On Religion*, p. 114; *Über die Religion*, p. 159.

necessary for any act of understanding to take place: we cannot build up our understanding of the whole by adding up the parts – that is, we cannot understand the speaker's language by simply conjoining all the individual utterances he makes, since we could not understand those utterances unless we already understood the language in some respect; and we cannot understand the language except by grasping the individual utterances that make it up. (A "language" for Schleiermacher should not be hypostatized as a kind of ideal entity that exists independently of its use by speakers; Schleiermacher's own emphasis on the irreducibility of individuality led him to rule out postulating anything like such a "language" – as a kind of ideal determinate entity that univocally fixes the meaning of the utterances – that is shared among speakers.) Schleiermacher drew the conclusion that such "understanding" of the meaning of another's utterance therefore cannot itself be codified into a set of rules, even though any language itself must partly consist of rules (such as those of syntax). If understanding were a function of applying rules, then we would need rules for the application of those rules, more rules for the application of those latter rules, and so forth, ad infinitum; and, since we cannot be required to grasp an infinite number of rules, there must some other, non-rule-governed way of grasping the meaning of utterances.

Understanding the meaning of a sentence must therefore rest on something that is not itself a rule nor itself simply another interpretation of the rule. On Schleiermacher's view, in understanding another, I bring to bear all my practical and intellectual skills to grasp what he might have meant in this particular context; I begin with a general background knowledge (a kind of "technical" knowledge) of the rules of grammar (both syntactical and semantical), and I take what he has said, form a hunch as to what he meant, and revise my grasp of his meaning until I manage to reach some kind of stable understanding. What he and I share, therefore, cannot be an ideal determinate language that fixes in advance what the meaning of our utterances will be; we must instead each share a kind of intuitive, non-discursive grasp of the whole context in terms of which we are encountering each other, and we can only work out our understandings of each other in light of that shared understanding.

The guiding presupposition of all this is that there is a "unity" that holds all the utterances together that we cannot fully grasp at first but whose grasp must be achieved, not discovered, in the act of coming to understand the other. Or, in Schleiermacher's own terms: "But we can only gradually arrive at the knowledge of the inner unity via the understanding of individual utterances, [and] therefore the art of explication

is also presupposed if the inner unity is to be found . . . One can only be sure that one has found the inner unity if one can collect the totality of all manners of use. But this is never completed; the task is therefore strictly infinite and can only be accomplished by approximation."[40] Schleiermacher himself gave competing descriptions of what this inner unity might be: sometimes he described it as a set of private, mental episodes, even images, which our words only express; sometimes, however, he spoke of thought as modeled on outward speech, as a kind of "inner speaking."[41] The general thrust of his arguments in his mature writings on hermeneutics and dialectics, however, points to a denial that one can make a sharp "inner/outer" distinction in acts of understanding: to understand the speaker, we must attribute certain beliefs to him, and we attribute these beliefs to him in light of our understanding of what he is saying. Getting at the "unity" that is presupposed in such acts of understanding involves the same interplay of creativity and responsiveness that he earlier argued characterizes the religious "intuition" of the universe. We must take up what the speaker is saying in light of our own background cognitive skills (which may or may not include oneself as a speaker of the language in which he is speaking), and we must then interpret his own individual utterances in light of that kind of only partially articulated background assumptions and skills, modifying both those background assumptions and our understanding of the utterance as we go along. It is crucial, Schleiermacher insisted, to acknowledge that "every utterer has an individuality of style which appears everywhere."[42]

There are only two general ways to go about this. The "comparative method" is methodical and utilizes canons of interpretation: one brings to bear certain established rules of interpretation on the utterances or writings of somebody, and one arrives at the individual aspects of what is meant – of the "individuality of style" – by comparing it with other similar types of utterance. For example, one might argue that one should understand a particular line from a fourteenth-century author in such-and-such a way by showing that other authors in the same period typically meant such-and-such by it; and one can show that the individual author meant something slightly different from what was "typically" said by members of his historical generation by focusing on the ways in which

[40] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings* (ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie) (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 235. Bowie's introduction to the volume is especially helpful in locating the importance of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics to contemporary discussions of the issues.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 9. [42] *Ibid.*, p. 256.

he and his writings differed from the others. Schleiermacher describes the other method as that of "divination": "The *divinatory* method is the one in which one, so to speak, transforms oneself into the other person and tries to understand the individual element directly."[43] One puts oneself in the other's shoes and tries to see the world from that person's particular point of view; in distinction from the comparative method, there can be no rules for such a procedure. Indeed, without presupposing such a cognitive ability to see things from other perspectives, Schleiermacher argued, we could not even arrive at the "comparative" method in the first place. A shared or intersubjective understanding of *what it is like* to have another point of view distinct from one's own is thus a presupposition of *all* acts of understanding; and that more general grasp of what it is like to have another point of view can itself be sharpened and refined (if one possesses the right capacities for empathy) into an understanding (always only more or less) of what it would be like to *be* that other person. This, however, is more of an emotional skill than it is a matter of more austerely cognitive matters; or, to put it another way, one cannot sharply separate cognitive from emotional skills in acts of understanding. (Not unsurprisingly, Schleiermacher, like many of his contemporaries, characterizes the divinatory method as "the female strength in knowledge of people," whereas the comparative method is male; men follow the rules, and women are more direct, emotional, and empathic.[44])

FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL: THE IRONY OF A FRAGMENTED LIFE

Friedrich Schlegel was in some ways the intellectual spark of the Jena circle, even though his own contributions to it did not outstrip those of the others. His own life had more than its share of drama. Born in 1772 to a moderately prosperous family in Hannover, he was originally pushed by his family to train for a career in banking, but, finding that line of work odious, he managed even without having finished *Gymnasium* to be admitted to university studies in Göttingen, where he studied classical philology along with law, and he continued his studies in law in Dresden. In 1793, under the influence of Caroline Böhmer (later to marry his brother, August, then to divorce him shortly thereafter and marry Schelling), he decided to try to make a career as an independent man of letters, a career path that in Germany at that time had had little real success. Plagued with the money problems attendant on

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 92. [44] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

such a career choice, he followed his brother, August Schlegel (a literary critic and, among other things, an excellent translator of Shakespeare) to Jena in 1796, from where, still short of money, he moved to Berlin in 1797 where he became friends with Schleiermacher and Ludwig Tieck (a major early Romantic writer); they formed among themselves one of the first circles of early Romantic intellectuals.

During his stay in Berlin, he also made the acquaintance of Dorothea Mendelssohn Veit in the salons of Berlin. Born in 1763 (and therefore almost ten years older than Schlegel), she was the oldest daughter of the philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn, and had been raised in a household that strictly observed Jewish law and custom; at an early age (in 1778), she had been married off to a Berlin banker, Simon Veit. Caught in a loveless marriage (with two sons), she and Friedrich Schlegel fell in love and began a passionate and publicly scandalous affair that led to her divorce in 1798. (Her close friend, Henriette Herz and their common friend, Schleiermacher, stood by both of them during this period.) In 1799, Schlegel moved back to Jena, where in 1798 he and August had founded and co-edited the journal, *Athenäum*, in which they were to publish and publicize the views of the early Romantics. (*Athenäum* ceased publication in 1800.) Almost immediately Dorothea joined him in Jena and became a force on her own in the Romantic circle. In 1799, Schlegel published a novel, *Lucinde*, an only barely disguised fictional account of his and Dorothea's ongoing non-marital affair. Its link of sexual passion and spiritual fulfillment between the two lovers in the novel and its open celebration of love unencumbered by the social conventions of marriage (and in which sexual fulfillment was thereby only more intensified) made the book both a scandal and a bestseller, and it made its author famous. The kind of "symphilosophy" advocated by the circle (the term was Schlegel's own coinage, as was the term, "romanticism" itself) made Jena into the center of avant-garde intellectual life in Germany, perhaps in Europe at the time. Friedrich Schlegel famously described the university as a "symphony of professors." Dorothea wrote to her friends in Berlin, still scandalized by her behavior, that "such an eternal concert of wit, poetry, art, and science as surrounds me here can easily make one forget the rest of the world."[45] The mercurial temperaments of the circle,

[45] The citation from Schlegel comes from Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 261; Dorothea Schlegel's remark is to be found in J. M. Raich (ed.), *Dorothea von Schlegel geb. Mendelssohn und deren Söhne Johannes und Philip Veit, Briefwechsel* (Mainz: Franz Kirchheim, 1881), 1, p. 19. Quoted in Hans Eichner, *Friedrich Schlegel* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), p. 91.

however, doomed it from the start, and with the death of Novalis in 1801, it finally broke up. Schlegel's own rebellious tendencies began themselves to become more conventional, and in 1804, he and Dorothea were finally married after both had moved to Paris and she had been baptized into the Protestant faith; in 1808, they both converted to Catholicism while in Cologne.[46] Friedrich and Dorothea moved to Austria in 1809, where he became a propagandist for Metternich's nationalist campaign against Napoleonic influence and control in Germany. While on a speaking tour, he died in Dresden in 1829.

Schlegel shared many, and probably even most, of the philosophical presuppositions of Schleiermacher and Novalis, and like both of them (and especially like Novalis), he was thoroughly anti-systematic in temperament, holding that the only appropriate literary form for thinking about self-consciousness was the "fragment," which he turned into a literary form in itself (published mostly in *Athenäum*). Only the "fragment" – an aphorism or a short meditation on some topic – could capture the sense in which what cannot be "represented" in consciousness can be nonetheless "hinted at" in art. The work of art points beyond itself to something that can be "shown" but not "said," about which we can thus only speak indirectly. Echoing Novalis, Schlegel declared that: "Philosophy is a mutual search for omniscience," something that he thought a good acquaintance with literature and poetry would cure.[47]

Schlegel's own major conceptual contribution to the early Romantic line of thought was the notion of *irony*. In recognizing that we can never be fully at home in the world because of the kind of contingent, self-interpreting, temporal beings we are, while also recognizing that, as the kind of creatures we are, we simply cannot escape reflecting on our basic commitments, we find ourselves faced with the most basic of contradictions in our own lives, which he expressed in various ways, but most succinctly as the "most authentic contradiction" in human self-consciousness, the "feeling that we are at the same time finite and infinite."[48] That is, we "feel" that we are or can be in touch with something that would justify our lives and actions and enable us to say that we were indeed "getting it right" in our judgments and actions; yet, at the same time, recognizing our own contingency and temporality, our own

[46] In *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), I erroneously remarked that Dorothea was Friedrich Schlegel's wife while they were in Jena.

[47] Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments* (trans. Peter Firchow) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), no. 344, p. 70.

[48] Schlegel, *Werke*, XII, p. 334; cited in Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, p. 304.

finitude, we realize that all our attitudes are contingent, time-bound, and subject to all the flaws of human character and our capacities for self-deception. The only appropriate response is that of irony, of realizing that, as reflective people, we can never fully identify with all of our commitments since we can never give them the kind of justification that we always nonetheless have a hunch "could" be given to them "if only" we could fully articulate that sense of "being" of which Novalis and Schleiermacher spoke. Or, to put it another way: we always have a sense of having to orient ourselves within some sense of our place in the greater scheme of things – such is a condition of self-consciousness – but, as reflective beings, we realize that our own "take" on this is never more than a contingent, even contradictory expression of our particular mode of understanding things. Irony expresses both our unavoidable commitments to certain projects and our own inevitable, reflective detachment from these same things. Irony is thus the appropriate stance to feeling both inescapably committed and inescapably detached at the same time.

Schlegel developed his theory of irony by creatively misinterpreting and radicalizing Fichte's notion of the self-positing "I." For Fichte, the "I" both licenses all its inferences and authorizes itself to issue such licenses. Adopting that to the conception of self-consciousness being worked out in common by the Romantic Jena crowd, Schlegel took Fichte's notion of self-authorization to imply that, however submerged the agent always is in his projects, as "self-positing," he is nonetheless always capable of backing away from them and even stepping out of them, of being both absorbed in them while never being fully identified with them. The two appropriate genres for an ironist are therefore allegory (which always points to a meaning beyond itself that it cannot discursively articulate) or the joke, which punctures in a "flash" (a *Blitz*) the pretensions to self-enclosure that almost always accompany conscious human life. (It might even be said that Schlegel's notion of allegory was already metaphorical itself, since it was clearly being used in a slightly different sense than the more usual sense of "allegory.") To see this was "Romantic," and, in Schlegel's account, Shakespeare thereby counts as the greatest of all the Romantic artists since his own subjectivity and commitments could never be exhausted by what was to be found in his plays; "Shakespeare" was always more than the author of his plays, a playful presence behind all the different appearances to be found in the various texts he left behind.

In one of his most famous aphorisms for *Athenäum*, Schlegel proclaimed that Romantic poetry "recognizes as its first commandment that the free choice (*Willkür*) of the poet can tolerate no law above itself" – Schlegel's

own radicalization of the themes of spontaneity and autonomy begun in Kant and continued in Fichte.[49] Truly self-legislating agents must be capable of setting all the rules for themselves, even the rules for setting the rules, and the rules for setting those, even while they are also being responsive to the world around them. If, therefore, everything really is up for grabs, then, as opposed to what Kant and Fichte thought, there can be no rules that are necessary to being a rational agent in general, since whatever criteria one would have to employ to justify such a conclusion would themselves be up for grabs; however, like all the early Romantics, Schlegel asserted that view about there being no rules while also holding equally strongly that there were indeed constraints on our willing that came *not* from our own self-legislation (or from "reason") but from "being" itself. Like the other early Romantics, he therefore concluded that art, not philosophy, was to play the crucial role in articulating this fundamental tension in experience.

The net effect of Schlegel's – indeed, all of the early Romantics' – reflections was to make aesthetics into one of the central disciplines of philosophy, a role that aesthetics had lost in Anglophone philosophy since the various empiricist and Humean attacks on the Earl of Shaftesbury's own aestheticism in the early eighteenth century. In this, they were only following Kant in marking out the aesthetic realm as a distinct, even autonomous realm of its own, whose norms were not reducible to those of morality, politics, entertainment, or economic production. However, they at least tried to resist the temptation to make art into a purely autonomous realm, a realm of "art for art's sake." For Schlegel and the other early Romantics, art was to be judged in terms of whether it gave us the *truth* about human life, and Schlegel, famously and combatively, argued that only a specifically *Romantic* art could accomplish that task, since only such an approach to art could possibly capture the sense of human finitude coupled with the intuition that there really is a way of "getting it right" about nature and consciousness. Schlegel also rejected the ideas that there might be some way to definitively set a foundation for our beliefs (as the Romantics took Reinhold to have attempted) or to find a foundation in our own spontaneous acts of self-positing (as they took Fichte to have done).[50] In an *Athenäum* fragment, Schlegel declared: "Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry . . . And it can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed

[49] Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, no. 116, p. 32.

[50] Charles Larmore in *The Romantic Legacy* is especially good on stressing this point.

and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest . . . The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal."[51] It is also not by accident that the early Romantics took the crucial step toward the modern reevaluation of music as the most subjective, maybe the deepest, of all the arts, as that which expresses most purely the kind of inwardness and link with "being" that conceptual thought can at best only vaguely and incompletely intimate. Music, which prior to the nineteenth century was understood as the lowest of the arts, as having genuine importance only as background to some sacred text or as a form of entertainment, under the influence of the early Romantics became reevaluated as the "deepest" because most "subjective" of all the arts.

Nonetheless, despite Schlegel's playful and witty insistence on the fragmented nature of experience and of human life in general, and his view (shared with the other early Romantics) of "feeling" as our connection with the kind of existence that is disclosed in our most primordial form of self-consciousness, there is a kind of abstractness about Schlegel's theory of agency or at least a fundamental tension in it. Schlegel's critical writings point the way to a kind of "social status" conception of agency, whereas *Lucinde* (and some of his many other, although not always consistent, remarks) stresses the element of flesh-and-blood human beings working out the inevitable tensions within human experience. For Schlegel the critic, the "self" becomes conceived along the lines of something like an office-holder, and any "self" can hold simultaneously multiply different offices (critic, lover, revolutionary, and so forth). The only thing that engenders the contradiction between the different "offices" that the individual "self" can hold is the implicit drive for unity among the various offices (or "selves"), and the only appropriate response to the contradictions engendered by such a demand for unity is that of irony. The self that stands above and is detached from its various offices is the ironic, self-legislating self; it is not the passionate, sensual self of *Lucinde*. The turn to "inwardness" in Schlegel's writings thus had a kind of double edge to it; it both embodied the early Romantic ideal of the irreducibility of individuality, and, at the same time, also showed how such a conception, if taken in another way, could drain the notion of subjectivity of any real commitment that could *matter* to it. In that

[51] Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, no. 116, pp. 31–32.

way, Schlegel prefigured both later Romanticism and the much later, late twentieth-century notions of post-modernism.

THE AMBIGUITIES OF REPUBLICANISM

Probably no other political idea seized control of the imagination of the eighteenth century more than that of republicanism. In both the Americas and Europe, enlightened men and women spoke glowingly of the virtues of republicanism, sometimes as opposed to monarchy, sometimes in alliance with it. What bound all these discussions and approbation of republican ideals together was the widespread agreement that republics were *free* and its citizens were *virtuous*. Beyond that, however, there was little agreement about what republicanism actually was.

The early Romantics were no exception. Like many in their generation, they at first welcomed the French Revolution, and interpreted it through the lens of German history, particularly, that of the Reformation. They tended to see it (perhaps wishfully) as the harbinger of a new moral and spiritual renewal of what they deeply felt was an ossified, stultifying German social order. As the Revolution progressed into its more violent phases, like many other Germans, they followed the path of disappointment followed by rejection, and, after the Napoleonic incursions into Germany, the ongoing wars on German soil, and the wholesale reorganization of German life, they tended to become more and more anti-revolutionary.

The longest standing misinterpretation of this period of German life (and of the early Romantics) came from Madame de Staël (1766–1817) in her book, *De l'Allemagne* (1810), in which she launched the idea that Germany was a land of poets and philosophers, not doers, and that this was because there was no political life available to Germans, which required those who would otherwise be its movers and doers to retreat from the political world into an ethereal world of thoughts. (She was well acquainted with the circle of early Romantics, having made a famous trip throughout Germany between December, 1803 and April, 1804; she counted August Schlegel, who was also the tutor to her son, as her friend.) With her book, though, was born the myth of the non-political or even the a-political German, supposedly a creature who was passive in politics and inclined to wandering dreamily off into realms of thought.

In fact, the Germans (intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike) were hardly passive during this period. There were social disturbances all over Germany during this period, and there was also an eruption of political

theory at work in Germany. It would be hard to write off Kant's, Fichte's, and later Hegel's work as "a-political," and almost all the characters involved in the story of post-Kantian thought had something to say about political matters. The early Romantics were just as taken with political matters as was anybody else, and they have been unfairly characterized, almost unanimously, in the literature that followed as either utter reactionaries or as befuddled dreamers. In fact, these Romantics were grappling with the political realities of their day, and the difficulties with their formulations stemmed from their rather vague, monarchist notions of republicanism rather than with any kind of political passivity or tendency to reaction on their part. (Although some members of the circle, like Friedrich Schlegel, became much more reactionary as they got older, even he cannot be characterized as a conservative during the period of his early career.) Their political thought was moreover influenced by Friedrich Schiller's well-known criticism of Kantian moral philosophy for its alleged "rigorism," its demand that duty and duty alone provide the motive of action; this seemed to the early Romantics, however much they took into account Kant's own attempts to disarm that objection, to keep out the contingent, emotional parts of life, to demand that we effectively discard those aspects of life that make such things as duty *matter* to us in the first place.

The most remarkable of these Romantic political theorists was Novalis, if for nothing else than for the sheer audacity of his ideas. In some ways, Novalis liked to pose both as a reactionary and a revolutionary; whereas the rest of the Jena circle liked to shock the solid *Bürger* of German life, Novalis liked shocking both the *Bürger* and the Jena circle itself. His most famous work, *Christianity or Europe*, although curiously enough not even published in his lifetime, was read to the Jena circle in November, 1799, and it completely succeeded in its goal of exasperating his friends. Superficially interpreted, the piece reads as if Novalis were arguing that the medieval period was a time of uninterrupted beauty and harmony, that this was solely due to the wisely executed hegemony of the Catholic Church, and that the only solution to the revolutionary upheavals of the time was to reinstate one Catholic Church, the old hierarchical society, completely hand over rule to a reconstituted Jesuit order, and forget about modernity. Novalis, however, was up to something very different, and his odd little tract exposes some of the key difficulties in the early Romantic view of political life in general.

Novalis's essay is a diatribe against the low state into which Germany had sunk, seen especially from the standpoint of a member of the minor

Saxon nobility. One of the major problems with "Germany" at the time – keeping in mind that there was no "Germany" at this time, only a series of principalities varying in size from the ridiculously small to the fairly large – was that it had no transnational institutions of any importance. After the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, it had been divided into its patchwork system of principalities, and after the Peace of Augsburg of 1555, which established the right of the prince to determine the established religion of his territory, even the Protestant Church ceased to be a transnational German institution. There had remained the fiction of the Holy Roman Empire with its associated courts to which people could in theory but never in practice appeal, but by 1799 it, too, had begun manifestly to reveal itself for the powerless fiction it had long since become. Quite significantly, it could simply mount no real resistance at all to the French Revolution or to the incursions of the seemingly invincible French army into German territories. The fabled German alliance that was to crush the brief French experiment had been routed by French troops at Valmy in 1792, and the French had pursued the fleeing, vanquished German armies deep into German territory. Since then, the French had basically been able to do what they wished with German resistance to them.

The result was to make intensely clear what had long since been clear enough. The Holy Roman Empire was powerless, and the Protestant Church in Germany had become just as hidebound by orthodoxy as the most fanatic slanderers of the Catholic Church had ever imagined the Catholic Church to be. Even worse, the Protestant Church was strictly local; every Protestant church in all the different *Länder* of Germany was subservient to its prince, who picked its ministers through his own Consistory and whose universities trained those ministers in the proper orthodoxy. The Protestant Church was thus little more than another outcropping of (local) princely authority.

Moreover, the economy in Germany, which in the Middle Ages had been a lively center of artisans and traders only to be thoroughly decimated by the Thirty Years War, had never again achieved its former buoyancy. Since the German princes of the eighteenth century needed funds to finance both the armies and the kind of opulent court life (with its battery of courtiers and regular, lavish festivals) that the French kings had made virtually de rigueur for all aspiring princes in Europe, they increasingly needed to delve more deeply into the economic lives of their subjects than earlier princes had been required to do, and, to accomplish that task, they also had to know both what the various resources of their

domain were and how best to exploit them. This led them, in turn, to establish various administrative agencies that would, supposedly on the basis of enlightened thought, rationalize the production of revenue that they needed to pursue their ever expanding princely ambitions. The traditional rights of the guilds or of the nobility itself thus stood in the way of these ambitious princes and their administrative cohorts always seeking to squeeze more money out of their *Land*'s economy, and, as more of the economy came under princely control, the lion's share of "middle-class" jobs available to young men came by and large to be lodged in the prince's administration, and one obviously had to keep faith with the prince if one was to keep one's job or advance in one's career.

All of this, for Novalis, represented "Europe": a secularized, machine-like set of states aimed at rationalizing all forms of economic life in order to wring more funds from the populace for the sake of princely ambition, in which culture itself came to be under princely control and therefore subject to the same kind of economic evaluation. To counter this, he proposed an alternative: an idealized "Christendom" of the Middle Ages, in which the "hometowns" were not under attack, rights were protected by virtue of the guilds and associations to which one belonged, and there was a unity of purpose at work in the religious life of the people that went beyond what any "prince" could decree. In short, there was (and, by implication, should be) a form of life that insulated individuals from the state, cloaking them in various forms of legal and non-legal protections from the all-intruding gaze of the princes. "Europe" was far from this ideal, being only a collection of sovereign states; "Christendom," on the other hand, had been (or, more importantly, *would be*) a set of states held together by something other than the imperatives of state power, namely, those having to do with "religion," with what all of the early Romantics called the "infinite."

In Novalis's telling of his odd fairy tale about the Middle Ages, the decline from such a unified "Catholic" – or what he likes to call "truly Catholic or truly Christian times"[52] – into a fragmented "Protestant" world was inevitable. "Humanity," he says, "was not mature enough, not cultivated enough for this splendid kingdom."[53] The inevitable result was Protestantism, followed by enlightened philology (as soon as the study of the Bible as a text became more important than religion as a form of life), and, in short order, the enlightened rule of efficient administration had taken over all of life, turning "the infinite creative music of the universe

[52] Novalis, "Christendom or Europe," in Hardenberg, *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, p. 139.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

into the uniform clattering of a monstrous mill, driven by the stream of chance and floating on it, a mill of itself without builder or miller . . . really a mill grinding itself."[54]

Novalis's fairy tale thus replays the Christian myth of initial paradise and inevitable fall (based on a new self-awareness and knowledge of the world and oneself); the issue for Novalis was, therefore, whether it would be possible to stage any kind of "return" to paradise while preserving such self-knowledge. Novalis notes (dripping with irony) that, at first, it looked as if the Jesuit order might restore the lost paradise, since, as the "mother of what are called secret societies," they sought to "make it the most pressing duty of Catholic Christendom to stamp out these heretics most cruelly as authentic comrades-in-arms of the devil," but they, too, failed to "endure forever," since, in fact, as artifacts of the modern experience and possessed of heightened learning and self-consciousness, they got themselves dissolved by the pope himself.[55]

The only true hope lies in an idealized "Germany," in which the "German is educating himself with all diligence to participate in a higher cultural epoch," of which we now only have hints, but which, when actualized, will issue forth in a "universal individuality, a new history, a new humanity, the sweetest embrace of a surprised, young church and a loving God, and the ardent conception of a new messiah in all its thousand members at once."[56] Novalis's point should have been clear to his intended audience: the new philosophy of idealism (represented not by Fichte but by Schelling), the new poetry being written by people like himself, the new religious sensibility being promoted by Schleiermacher, and the new modes of self-relation being explored by the Jena circle, would be the harbingers of a new, genuinely revolutionary world, which would produce not the restoration of the old Catholic Church, nor the triumph of the existing Protestant Church, but something authentically *new* which would finally ensure the reign of virtue and true republicanism as guided by a new and deeper form of religious response. Like Schleiermacher, he calls this "Christian," even though he says it consists solely of "joy in all religion," and in the "notion of meditation." (The older mode of being Christian, which had to do with "faith in Christ, his mother and the saints" was the old Catholic faith, which, he noted, had already run its course.[57])

No doubt to Novalis's astonishment, the response to his article when he presented it to the Jena circle in 1799 was more or less stunned disbelief

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 144. [55] *Ibid.*, p. 143. [56] *Ibid.*, p. 143. [57] *Ibid.*, p. 151.

that he could even entertain the very thought of restoring Catholicism and the old society of orders. On the one hand, he should not, however, have been surprised: the ironic undertones of the piece are subtle enough to be entirely overlooked by anybody not explicitly looking for them. On the other hand, though, his piece illustrated a crucial ambiguity in the early Romantics' response to the rapidly changing social and political reality around them. Whereas Kant had been heavily influenced by Scottish writings on morals and politics and had explicitly argued for a "liberal" political order, the early Romantics were far less influenced by any Scottish or English conceptions. If anything, they tended in particular to hold English views in contempt as crude, philistine, purely commercial, and blind therefore to the "higher" truths.[58] Moreover, their own "revolutionary" notions of the new social order were heavily colored by the existing "hometown" structures of contemporary German life and by the idealized memories of Germany prior to its devastation in the century before. Thus, although they did not wish to restore the old society of orders, they nonetheless took large elements of it as their model.

Kant's own idea of the "ethical commonwealth" clearly served as their inspiration, since it fit so well into the rather vague notions of "republicanism" drifting around at the time. In that rather vague notion of "republicanism," the ancient notion of virtue as a form of self-sacrifice was set aside, and little emphasis was put on what Kant himself had stressed for the political realm, namely, the necessity of coercive law in a social order filled with different interests. Instead, the early Romantics (as did many others) put front and center a more "affective" model of social life, of virtue as love of (or at least social friendship with) one's fellow citizens. In a "true republic," they held, people would be virtuous, would freely and in a friendly manner cooperate with each other, and, most importantly, the rulers would be men – and, for Schleiermacher, Friedrich Schlegel, Caroline Schelling, and Dorothea Schlegel, also women – of both virtue and learning, who by virtue of their ethical and cultural superiority, would clearly rise to the level of leadership.

In 1796, Friedrich Schlegel had published a review of Kant's short monograph, "Perpetual Peace," published the year before. In it, Schlegel criticized many of Kant's positions, including Kant's aversion to democracy. Kant had argued that the proper rule of law – that embodies in

[58] Henry Crabb Robinson, a key figure in the importation of Romantic ideas into Britain, reports of his encounters with Schelling and the other members of the Jena circle in this period and of their dismissal of the English as a shallow, commercial people. See Edith J. Morley (ed.), *Crabb Robinson in Germany: 1800–1805: Extracts From His Correspondence* (Oxford University Press, 1929).

itself what is objectively right – need not and should not be taken to be equivalent to democratic rule; indeed, the rule of law could only be safeguarded by putting its protection beyond the rule of the mob. Schlegel argued that, since there is always a gulf between what is truly, ultimately right and what we, finite, partial beings can establish as *seeming* right to us, we can at best only "approximate" to the standards of objective right by relying on some "fiction" as an empirical replacement for the a priori moral will. The will of the majority should therefore be the stand-in, the "fiction," for the pure, objective will. In saying that, however, Schlegel also displayed what was the most widely held assumption of those speaking of republicanism and democracy in this period: "Of course there is a *legitimate aristocracy*, a *genuine patriciate*, which is completely distinct from the perverted hereditary aristocracy, whose absolute injustice has been so satisfactorily demonstrated by Kant . . . but it is possible only in a democratic republic" and "the *reign of morality* is the necessary condition of the *absolute perfection* (the maximum of community, freedom, and equality) of the state, indeed even of every degree of higher political excellence."[59]

This perfectly encapsulated the very vagueness of the concept of republicanism that made it so appealing to so many. It rested ultimately on the view that, in a republican democracy, the "people" would gather together to select which among the best learned and most virtuous men and women would lead them. That the "people" might elect somebody not part of the "legitimate aristocracy" simply was outside of the bounds of imagination for many of the early supporters of republicanism; not unsurprisingly, as the French experience in democratic rule became more clear to them, their ardor for republicanism itself correspondingly began to cool, and they were quickly set on the path to conclude that the kingdom of virtue for which they had hoped was simply impracticable in a fallen world.

The early Romantic emphasis on "love" as the solution to the problem of individuality and otherness shaped the political responses of the Jena circle: if "love" bound an individual to another in a way that both united and preserved the individuality of the couple, then something like "love," and not coercive legal rules, should be the "ethical" bond among citizens of a just order. Nothing was more of an anathema to the Romantics than the give and take of a political order that rested on the crudity of balancing competing interests.

[59] Friedrich Schlegel, "The Concept of Republicanism," in Beiser (ed. and trans.), *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 102, 108.

Novalis himself had stated these views succinctly in a short published piece, "Faith and Love or The King and Queen" in 1798. Assuming his familiar pose as the champion of the old order, Novalis (a Saxon) argued that admiration of the Prussian royal family is the basis for the Prussian state to be well ordered, since, as he put it, "the conduct of the state depends on the public temperament (*Gesinnung*). The only basis for true reform of the state is the ennobling of these temperaments."[60] The only alternative to a state in which the bonds between people are each citizen's noble temperament would be that of a state "governed like a factory," which, so Novalis went on to claim, Prussia had been since the death of Friedrich Wilhelm I. In such an order, the ruling principle had become that of "egoism" and "self-interest" (which forms the "germ of the revolution of our time"[61]). Only when the king and queen are themselves models of virtue can virtue and not self-interest become the bond between people because "the court is actually the large-scale model of a household. The great households of the state fashion themselves according to this, the small ones imitate these and so on down the line."[62] Only the personal bond of "love" and "virtue" (like a family) and not the disinterested bond of law and rights (like a "factory"), seemed adequate to Novalis and his fellow Romantics; for them, the "ethical commonwealth," not the "political commonwealth," held out the greater attraction, since only in the "ethical commonwealth" would the ideals of spontaneity and free self-relation be realized.

The unease between modern conceptions of freedom and their incorporations into modern institutions – indeed, the inherent tensions and the kinds of profound disappointments that seemed necessarily to come in the wake of increasing modernization – were at the center of that generation's experience and their articulations of it. The unease they felt with Kant's and Fichte's solutions was palpable; but their refusal to go back to the older ways was equally intense. However, their own attempt to have it both ways – to stress both spontaneity and responsiveness, and to carve out an irreducible sense of individuality – was itself to have its own profound effects on the development of the modern experience.

[60] Novalis, "Faith and Love or The King and Queen," in Hardenberg, *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, p. 91; *WTB*, II, p. 298. I rendered *Gesinnung* as "temperament" instead of "attitude" in this context; a *Gesinnung* runs much deeper in one's character than does a mere attitude. I also wanted to make the connection to Kant's own discussion of the issue of *Gesinnung* and morality more clear.

[61] Novalis, "Faith and Love or The King and Queen," in Hardenberg, *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, p. 93; *WTB*, II, p. 300.

[62] Novalis, "Faith and Love or The King and Queen," in Hardenberg, *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, p. 91; *WTB*, II, p. 298.