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Philosophy as Poetic Expression: Novalis

Abstract: The work of Novalis lends itself to multiple interpretations and inquiries that pertain not only to the layers of the history of philosophy but also to those of aesthetics, poetry, hermeneutics, metaphysics, and theology. The present text aims to review several landmarks of Novalis's conception regarding the role and meaning of philosophical poetry and poetic philosophy in relation to the domains mentioned above. Thus, it seeks to question several themes, among them the initial sources of Novalis's thought, philosophy as art, and the great Romantic concepts of intuition, emotion, and imagination; magical idealism and the role of the transcendental poet; the fascination with the One as the metaphysical foundation of the world; the progression of reconstructive aesthetic perception; the critique of Fichte's gnoseology and the adoption, within Novalis's poetic-philosophical concerns, of Spinoza's proposed pantheism; the superiority of the moral factor over the magical-dogmatic one; the priest as poet in Novalis's Romantic-Idealist vision; and the late resonances of his work. Of course, the complexity and depth of Novalis's writings allow only a partial approach to their meanings and significance, many of which remain open subjects for future interpretations.

Keywords: poetry, poet, emotion, romanticism, idealism, aesthetic.

Introduction. The Historical-Cultural Context

After the gnoseological resurrection imposed by Kantian critique, European spirituality encountered a new grand episode in the evolution of universal culture - namely, the period of *German Romanticism*. Marked by the titanic contributions of thinkers such as Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Goethe, this exceptional interval in the development of the entire historical register of humankind brought to the forefront personalities who, in their works, united not only the strength of preceding contributions - those of ancient, scholastic, and modern thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant - but also the artistic beauty of poetry, literature, music, and the visual arts. Thus, we witness not only the immortal creations of Beethoven and Goethe but also their memorable encounters under the sign

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of a shared cultural destiny. Alongside these names, definitively inscribed in the constellation of universal history of the human spirit, shine also those of Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Hölderlin, E.T.A. Hoffmann, the Brothers Grimm (Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm), J.G. Fichte, F.W.J. Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, G.W.F. Hegel, J.G. Herder, and also Friedrich Leopold von Hardenberg¹ - known under the pseudonym *Novalis* (Reid 2024, xii) - a pseudonym he adopted in 1798, meaning *cultivator of virgin soil* (Safranski 2014, 74), the symbolism and connotations of this name pointing clearly to a work of cultural renewal and exploration.

Developed within a short span of time, his work achieved an extraordinary symbiosis between philosophical and poetic discourse, between the thought that analyzes lucidly and the emotion that expresses itself metaphorically. For him, philosophy cannot develop its discourse without the constant appeal to poetic symbolism, while poetry risks remaining without substance and depth in the absence of philosophical meditation. His interest in philosophy can be observed throughout his work - in his unfinished novels as well as in the series *Hymns to the Night* - which are profoundly marked by the treatment of metaphysical concepts of Kantian and Fichtean origin such as self-consciousness, representation, and knowledge. At the same time, there is a constant attitude in his writings of recognizing the moral value and ethical axiomatics that characterize poetic discourse - a concern also present in authors such as Hölderlin, a poet later evoked in Heidegger's hermeneutic studies. It should be noted that, despite the common opinion that Romantic authors are positioned far from scientific thought, often rejecting the rigorous perspectives proposed by its representatives, Novalis possessed exceptional training in the exact sciences. After studying law, he attended the *Mining Academy of Freiberg*, where he studied mineralogy, geology, chemistry, metallurgy, mining techniques, applied mathematics, and mechanics. All these disciplines may seem extremely distant from Novalis's cultural preoccupations and literary work, yet they played an important role in providing rigor and argumentation to his writings - works that, though poetic-essayistic in form, consistently maintain a rational and discursive foundation (Reid 2024, xiii). Therefore, when referring to the personality of Novalis, we must view it as a complex, multidisciplinary sphere - a cultural presence reminiscent of the Renaissance model of the complete intellectual, capable of understanding and integrating within his work a vast range of knowledge and skills drawn both from the humanistic and the scientific domains. This symbiosis had a direct impact on his creations, whether in literature, essays, or poetry. Law, history - which he saw as one of the highest and most comprehensive themes for philosophical reflection (Novalis 2024, 19-20) - philosophy, literature, poetry (understood as the art closest to *Spirit*), as well as the exact sciences, all formed the foundation of the young Novalis's education. He regarded himself, above all, as a poet of philosophical nature - an author who unites

abstract concepts from the highest spheres of human spirituality with the most contemporary issues of his time. It should also be mentioned that Novalis embodies a personality in which we can perceive the echoes of a transition from systematic philosophy - profoundly influenced at that time by Kantian critique — toward a poetic form of philosophy, an approach that appeals to metaphor, hyperbole, and the concentrated expressive power of literary symbolism. Therefore, for Novalis, the philosopher must possess the qualities of a poet; philosophy is understood less as a technique of thought and more as an art of lyrical contemplation.

Initial Sources, Encyclopedic Propedeutic Perspectives, and the Shaping of Poetic Philosophy

At the beginning, influenced by the work of Herder, Novalis approached various themes centered around the idea of national and cultural identity, the philosophy of history and culture. He was also influenced by the powerful trend of Enlightenment thought, with Kant's complex work being extremely influential at that time. Life offered him two great providential encounters, namely the intersection of his destiny with the poet Hölderlin and the philosopher Fichte, a moment that took place at the house of Friedrich Niethammer in May 1795. Evidently, Novalis was influenced by the analytical power of the metaphysics of the subject developed by Fichte (Reid 2024, xiii) as well as by the profound and unmistakable poetic vision of Hölderlin (idem). *The Wissenschaftslehre*, the theory or doctrine of science developed by Fichte - a theory that concerned the dynamics of the knowing self and the way in which it could extend its field of inquiry to the frontier of the non-self - exerted a major influence on Novalis's thought and formed the basis of one of the most representative philosophical writings in his work, namely the *Fichte Studies* (Reid 2024, xiv, xix). The years that followed were marked by multiple creative efforts, among which the elaboration of a Romantic *Encyclopedia*, which he never finished, the completion of certain studies on themes related to the role and importance of the novel, the value of the correlation between philosophy and the natural sciences, as well as the possible philosophical valences of mathematics, physics, or chemistry. He remained faithful to philosophical poetry and would come to be known under the pseudonym-name Novalis, his recognition arising through the publication of his writings in the most representative journal of German Romanticism, namely *Athenaeum*, a publication founded by August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, two major figures of that time of German cultural rebirth. He published poems, the most famous being included in the series *Hymnen an die Nacht*, aphorisms, two novels, *Die Lebrlinge zu Saïs* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen/Afterdingen*, works in which

he would set forth some of his philosophical ideas, and a politico-religious essay, *Christianity or Europe*. He died in 1801, struck down by tuberculosis, at the age of 29. (Reid 2024, xv)

The friends and colleagues of his creative circle played a significant role not only in the care and posthumous publication of his largely fragmentary work but also in the construction of the myth surrounding his personality, Novalis becoming, through this mythologization of his work and life, one of the best-known symbols of universal Romanticism. His work would influence the thought of other titans of universal culture such as Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, and would later, in the twentieth century, leave its mark on Heideggerian hermeneutics (Reid 2024, xv). Although he was an adherent of metaphysical and poetic conceptualizations, Novalis was an intellectual anchored in the cultural, political, social, and economic dynamics of his time. There are multiple influences from major historical events and from the emergence of great cultural movements that influenced his writings—moments such as the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, and the Enlightenment, especially the German *Aufklärung*. Faithful to Herder's conceptions concerning the irreversible connection between philosophical thought and the cultural context of its emergence, Novalis would constantly relate himself to the mobilities and transformations of his time. At the same time, these personal opinions regarding the period in which he lived were correlated with the influences of his reading of the works of Fichte, Kant, as well as Plato and Plotinus (Reid 2024, xvi). The problems of the metaphysics of Kantian gnoseology, as well as the theme of the relationship of knowledge and perception between the *self* and the *non-self* in Fichte's *Doctrine of Science*, become central elements of Novalis's thought. Likewise, the Platonic bipolar vision of the world - the duality between the world of *perfect Ideas* and the world of *imperfect copies*, between the ideal and the real, between the eternal and the ephemeral - would constitute major themes in the work of Novalis. We must mention that Plato's theses, developed in his famous Dialogues, were constantly taken up, under various conceptual forms, by the great representatives of German Romanticism, such as, alongside Novalis, Hölderlin, Schelling, Schleiermacher, or Friedrich Schlegel (Beiser 2003, 15). Likewise, the search for a unity of all sciences, for a unifying principle that lies at the foundation of all existence and sustains the complexity of the world and of thought, represents for Novalis a subject to which he would constantly return, this theme being probably inspired by his readings of the work of Plotinus, the ancient thinker who developed an entire metaphysics around the idea of the One as the unifying and universal principle of the world. The French Encyclopedists, *the social philosophy* of J. J. Rousseau, *the pantheism* proposed by Spinoza, *the moral*

philosophy offered to humanity in the immortal verses of Shakespeare (Reid 2024, xvi), as well as the up-to-date scientific knowledge of that time in chemistry, physics, or medicine - all these constituted sources of inspiration for the creation of Novalis, a creation that sought to be a poetic work of philosophical nature or, one might say, reversing the terms, a poetic philosophy. From the perspective of these facts, we can affirm that Novalis was not an author who merely referred to these classical authors and to these major cultural directions, but one who developed his own philosophical-aesthetic vision starting from these reference points and often approaching them in an originally critical manner. Novalis manifested a capacity for autonomy as well as for interpretive elaboration in relation to the dimension of universal culture; he generated a constant critical and exegetical exercise toward the great works and was not content with the position of an epigone who merely admires or follows great ideas without the sense of lucidity and contemplative inquiry. The authors and works he approached thus pass through the filter of his clear and analytical thought, he developing an approach that criticizes but does not accuse, an act of cultural exploration that seeks to be objective, transparent, and just in relation to the texts and creators addressed (Reid 2024, xx).

Philosophy as Art. Intuition, Emotion, and Imagination as Foundations of Poetically Expressed Philosophy

One of the main criticisms brought against Novalis's work would be *the typology of his stylistics* - a manner of writing that often seems far too poetic, a style that frequently resorts to metaphor, hyperbole, and aphorism. Of course, these criticisms may be partially justified insofar as we are adherents of an extremely rigorous, strictly formal and rational way of doing philosophy, one that constantly demands scientific arguments and logical support. (Reid 2024, xx) For Novalis, however, philosophy is based on positive emotion, constructive feeling, the affective experience that elevates consciousness toward the principles of beauty that elude strictly formal rational understanding—the affective enthusiasm, which must not be confused with fanaticism (Novalis 2024, 15-16), being one of the most important driving forces of creativity. Of course, within this mode of philosophizing, the intervention and analytics of reason are not excluded, but they are used as instruments of organization and ordered expression of the intensity of affective energies. Thus, within Novalis's work, the dimension of noble feelings is much more important - feelings that call upon reason as an instrument of discipline, control, and formulation aimed at addressing others - than the forms of rationality, which can only seek emotional support, an affective supplement meant to complete the edifice of

strictly rational arguments. Therefore, *feeling* takes precedence, and from this perspective, poetry - as a form of expression of emotional experiences - becomes the foundation of philosophical discourse and constructions. We witness a reversal of priorities within the dimension of philosophical creation, in the sense that the expression of affective dynamics is supported by reason, and not the chaining of rational arguments being supported by an appeal to the realm of feelings. Thus, *poetic expression* can be assumed as the red thread running through the entire philosophy proposed by Novalis, as an exponent of early European Romantic thought. (Reid 2024, xii-xxiii)

In his works, one can observe multiple mosaic-like constructions; there are disparate approaches to themes from epistemology, metaphysics, hermeneutics, ontology, as well as political philosophy or concerns from various exact sciences. All these fragmentations may give the impression of a lack of coherence and a confusion in the perception and processing of the data offered—a seeming chaos imposed upon the reader's effort to understand. In fact, for the attentive reader of Novalis's texts, there emerges the picture of a cathedral of aphorisms that induce sensations, feelings, and emotions, that offer a living state of spirit, transporting one into a dimension of spiritual depth impossible to convey solely through the play of rational syllogisms. Novalis's aphoristic style, taken up in the 19th century by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, or Schopenhauer, does not seek to forcibly impress the reader, but rather to invite him to think and to feel emotionally together with the author - to be a fellow traveler on his spiritual journey. (Reid 2024, xxi)

The poetic writing thus becomes the *logbook* of the life of creative consciousness, and the reader a comrade of the philosopher who invites him on this fascinating voyage. Thus, for Novalis, philosophy must work from practical life toward the great heights of consciousness - that is, it must begin with the smallest details of human existence and follow its ascent toward the peaks of humanity's dreaming and beauty. In this context, intellect reveals itself as more than a mere instrument of affectivity; it is postulated as a *fruit of feeling*, as the noblest product of the highest human emotions. The aim of Novalis's poetic style does not appear, therefore, to be the offering of information or simple reports and formal discourses. The purpose of this metaphorical creative effort seems rather to be the attempt to *move* the reader's consciousness, to reach deeply into his mind and soul, to generate that emotion which *shakes* and that process of *reflective contemplation*. (Reid 2024, xxi)

And for this vibration that both moves and provokes thought, Novalis used in a brilliant way philosophizing in a poetic style and philosophical poetry; and in terms of form, he clothed his creation in the structures of the extended essay, the novel, the Socratic dialogue, and also in verse. Unlike Fichte, who developed an extensive metaphysical and

gnoseological system centered around the dialectic between the self and the non-self, Novalis considered that philosophy must not be regimented into logical formulas or fixed conceptual points. In his view, these pillar-elements are only factors of a fictive and relative status and cannot constitute an unshakable foundation for the analysis of existence and the way in which man assumes and thinks his being. The true foundation of philosophy is the life of the spirit, the experience and feeling of ascent toward the Absolute; therefore, the foundations of philosophy can only be *poetic* in nature, and the philosopher must be and remain an artist of thought and aphoristic expression. *The absolute self* postulated by Fichte as an incontestablegnoseological principle, a corrective factor of human knowledge, represents for Novalis an ideal toward which the finite self must tend - to participate, in a Platonic sense, through poetic-philosophical experience. The search for a total beginning in philosophy leads, in Novalis's view, only to conceptual errors, while the inquiry into the unconditioned projects our analysis always toward the conditioned. The Absolute withdraws before our analytical insistence, always escaping between the fingers of formal logic, only to reveal itself to poetic experience and creation - the faculty of *imagination* playing a key role in the process of understanding the Absolute, an understanding that can only be *intuitive*. We must specify, in this context, that alongside the works of Novalis, the creations of Schelling and Schlegel also consistently referred to the concept of *imagination* - a concept emphasized by Fichte through his vision of the duality between self and non-self, a metaphysical andgnoseological vision in which imagination had the determining role of a bridge between idea and perception, between mind and feeling, between reason and emotion. (Neumann 2022, 59)

Magical Idealism and the Transcendental Poet

For Novalis, the Idea of an *all-encompassing* science - an idea he repeatedly observes in Fichte - is realizable, and it forms the foundation for his attempt to create a *Romantic Encyclopedia*, unfortunately left unfinished due to his untimely death. But this unified science, a question that had been analyzed by European thought for several centuries, with the Renaissance being the milieu in which it took shape through the proposal of the ideal of the complete man, cannot, in Novalis's opinion, be built on the foundations of strict Kantian rationality; on the contrary, it could have developed by relating to experience, emotion, feeling, and the creative force endowed by these realities of our soul. From this perspective, Novalis considers Fichte's thought to be entirely unpoetic. It is evident that these multiple critical references to Fichtean philosophy betray the decisive influence of

Fichte's system of thought on Novalis's poetic philosophy, but the detachment from metaphysical and gnoseological rationalism is the act that becomes necessary precisely through these engagements with Fichte's work, Novalis effectively being one of the pioneers of early Romanticism who felt the need to shift philosophical discourse from the strictly formal to a highly stylized one. (Reid 2024, xxi-xxiii)

For Novalis, the authentic philosopher must be guided by the creed of what he calls *magical idealism*, (Reid 2024, xxii) that is, a form of integrating one's perception of the world into our sphere of feeling. Thus, the entire existence becomes part of our affective life, charged with meanings, signs, and symbolism that reason can decipher only within the perimeter and dimension opened and offered by affectivity. Therefore, poetry and the aesthetic sense are fundamental elements that must be combined with logical, argumentative discourse on the path toward the great truths of humanity and life. Philosophy must cultivate its artistic, poetic side, and the philosopher must assume not only a mission of analysis but also one of intense aesthetic, moral, and metaphysical experience aimed at surpassing the immediate given, the empirical concrete. Thus, the leap over this ontic wall cannot be achieved solely through strictly logical, formalized discourse; a strong participation of affectivity expressed poetically, symbolically, in metaphors capable of broader penetration and synthesis than mere analytical thought is required. From this perspective, poetry in combination with philosophy becomes *transcendental poetry*, and the poet - if he possesses the necessary external conditions, such as the ease and calm of a life without excessive social obligations (Novalis 2024, 289-290) - transforms into a *magical idealist* or *transcendental poet*, an artistic and philosophical personality capable of metamorphosing the data of experience; only through this transformation does he gain access to the profound meanings of existence. In this context of the symbiosis between the philosophical and the poetic, *imagination* plays an extremely important role, the freedom of imaginative endeavor being the path to achieving the revelation of universal totality, a spiritual unity that Novalis defines with the term *Geist* (Reid 2024, xxii), a term that in German means *Spirit*. Everywhere, Novalis considers, the language of *Spirit* is heard as the unifying bond of the world, and efforts to promote partiality over the importance of the whole are mere acts of betrayal against *Spirit*; they are signs of a *disease* of consciousness, as Novalis calls it. For him, the organic harmony of our body cannot be explained without the presupposition of a *world-soul*, nor can we understand the order of the world without accepting an absolute rational Being who serves as the transcendent guarantor of universal Unity. (Novalis 2024, [frag. 453] 212) In this context, poetry in philosophy is seen as the art of constructing *transcendental health*, poetry being the absolute reality and

the *hero* of philosophy, its essential dimension, according to Novalis. As Novalis testifies about his own vision of philosophy, for him poetry is *Reality* as well as the core, the essence of his philosophy: the more poetry exists in a creation, the more truth it contains. (Reid 2024, xxiii) The vision regarding the importance of poetry within philosophical contemplation is closely linked, in Novalis, to the question of the role of art in philosophy, of how art underlies philosophical discourse, and of how *imagination* supports the perceptive and interpretive experience of the world. If one desires a profound understanding of existence, Novalis tells us, this is not possible without the support of imagination and without poetic, symbolic, and metaphorical experience and expression. Thought without poetic thrill does not, in Novalis's opinion, possess the capacity to probe the foundations of existence, that primordial substrate of meaning and basic ontic architecture. From this perspective, Novalis does not assume the role of a *spectator* toward art, as Nietzsche might express it; he wishes to be an *active creative factor*, a consummate *actor* of art who plays out his performance to the end within his own work. He is, therefore, a contemplative artist, a Romantic thinker cultivating his hermeneutic and metaphysical lyrical force without neglecting the constant appeal to evidences and the rigor of reason.

The Projection of Poetic Metaphysics toward Plotinian-Type Transcendental Unity and the Aesthetic Reconfiguration of Perception

The issue raised by Novalis is *the absence of beauty*, as the object of art, from our empirical world, from temporal everyday life. This idealized beauty is missing from the midst of the mundane daily existence; it must be discovered by the artist, this being the supreme mission of any person of art, and therefore also of the poet-philosopher. He creates an exceptional artistic structure, a work of art that alone is capable of breaking reality, of transcending it toward an absolute beyond where ideal beauty resides. It is important to note that, for Novalis, the poet must not neglect the immanent, the reality of this ephemeral world, but must transcend it; in this sense, he must look beyond the knowledge and data of science in his journey toward the timeless, transcendent realms. (Novalis 2024, 298-306) Only in this way, from the revelation of this ideatic background, does a second key concept emerge, a second primordial reality upon which Novalis insists as much as on the concept of *beauty*. This is the idea of *the Whole*, of universal *Unity*. Through his poetic contemplation, the philosopher manages not only to reach that transcendent *beyond*, where Ideatic Beauty resides, but also to grasp the unity of the bipolar world, the harmony that includes the existential

fragments of the temporal, ephemeral dimension as well as eternity, the Absolute. Thus, the philosopher returns, from this unified ontological and metaphysical vision, to the world subject to time and discovers the sublimity of every detail, every moment of life, every instant in our lives. The nobility and sublimity of our transient existence is perceived, in Novalis's view, only from the perspective of the existential whole of the world, in which time and eternity are reunited, those Platonic worlds of *Perfect Ideas* and *imperfect copies*. Therefore, the philosopher descends from the heights of the conceptual Absolute toward the components of everyday life, integrating them into a universal whole. From such all-encompassing harmony, each of these fragments becomes a piece of a universal mechanism and is touched by the beauty of the universal Spirit that unites and gives destiny and meaning to each component of the mobilities of matter as well as to each manifestation of human consciousness. Thus, nothing is lost or devoid of spiritual significance, the philosopher being called, precisely through *poetic sensibility* assisted by the vigilance of reason, to identify the value, the axiomatic of every detail and manifestation of the world as well as of its impressive totality.

The matter at hand for Novalis is, therefore, the philosopher's capacity to ascend and descend meditatively on this scale of universal value, understanding the importance of each detail as well as the unity that encompasses them, that integrates them perfectly. Practically, the philosopher is the one who *reconstructs* the mosaic of the world, builds universal unity by uniting the separate pieces into a universal puzzle. He is a minor *demiurge* who imitates the great Creator, rearranging the same components of the world in different creative formulas expressed in his philosophical-poetic work. Thus, the depths, the metaphysical foundations of the world are captured through an active process revealed by constructions such as poetry, aphorism, essay, or novel. Novalis considered that existence in its totality must be *romanticized*, and only after fulfilling this stage of projecting romantic feeling onto the world can the presence of beauty be apprehended both in details and in the ontic totality. Thus, philosophy becomes not only an art of contemplation but also a mastery of harmonious living, an art in itself of the way of living. The energy of poetry, present in philosophy, is, in Novalis's opinion, the force of organization and harmonization of the fragments of life, segments that are reunited under the impact of poetic contemplation and express the totality of the entire universe, this contemplation having the capacity to choose, unify, and order. (Novalis 2024, 314-331) In this sense, the philosopher must also be a poet, a Romantic visionary who utilizes symbol and the power of metaphor correlated with the depths of lucid thought to make the great leap toward the enigmatic and ever-fascinating Absolute. (Reid 2024, xxiii-xxiv)

Aesthetic Thought and the Critique of the Transcendental Idealism Proposed by Fichte. The Influences of Spinozistic Pantheism

Following Schelling's vision of a *philosophy of nature*, Novalis was an advocate for offering a metaphysical response to Fichte's epistemological system. Like Schelling, Novalis considered that the entire conceptual architecture developed by Fichte was too egocentric, placing full emphasis on the dimension of the *self* and on the expansive force of its knowledge, a force that can extend up to the boundary with the *non-self*. What is neglected in this construction of concepts and analytics that target the dynamics and knowing capacity specific to the self is exteriority, nature, and the forms in which it is perceived. Thus, Novalis also supports, alongside Schelling, the need for the elaboration of a philosophy of nature, a theory and poetics of the forces of nature meant to open consciousness to the principles and mysteries of the universe. In this sense, Novalis asserts that it is not the *dissectors* of nature, those who split it merely to subject it to the microscope, who will reach its great mysteries, but rather the poet-philosopher holds the priority of receiving the revelation of nature's unified flow, of perceiving and understanding that *unifying fluid* of nature, as Novalis calls it. (Novalis 2024, 342-347) The intention, therefore, is not to reject Fichte's transcendental idealism but, on the contrary, to complete it with a vision that involves the use of the assumption and understanding of affect, of feeling transposed into poetic forms of expression. For Novalis, the Fichtean system, which revolves around the epistemological duality between self and non-self, is not capable of rendering the depths of universal existence, the inexpressible rational beauty and splendor of openings toward the absolute. One must appeal to art and aesthetic experience, which support the endeavor of transcendental reason, an endeavor perfectly justified but insufficient in accessing primal truths. Novalis does not reject, through this stance, Kantian-type criticism, taken up, on another level, by Fichte, but he adds to it the force of knowing and understanding the world also through *aesthetic experience*, through *lyrical* contemplation. Novalis distances himself from the classical *mechanistic* vision of the world conceived as an organic whole, especially by the great thinkers of the dawn of modernity, Descartes and Newton. He came conceptually closer to Plotinus's vision regarding the unity of the world under the spectrum of an all-encompassing *One*, not only through the force of knowledge but also through the light of universal love that acts like a trans-existential binder. At the same time, Novalis also found resonance in Spinoza's philosophy, in the *pantheism* he proposed, which describes not only a unified world but also one in correlation with the knowing

self, against the background of an infinite love that reunites the entire universe, in this sense Spinoza asserting in his work *Ethics* that God is *Nature* itself. (Spinoza 2000, 3) In fact, the energy that sustains the totality of existence cannot be understood through the conceptualizations of reason apart from moral and aesthetic elevation and bearing. This is the point of convergence with Novalis's thinking, which supports the cultivation of inner beauty and poetic expression as the deepest form of philosophical rendering of the world's primordial meanings. The Spinozist idea of *infinite love* is not found in Fichte's philosophy, Novalis laments, nor is the endeavor for authentic balancing and harmonization between ideal and real, between subject and object, between self and nature. (Reid 2024, xxx-xxxi) What is fascinating in Spinoza's thought, according to Novalis, is the capacity to recognize the force of love in shaping certain aspects of reality and in bringing together, under the spectrum of a coherent whole, all components of existence. Thus, reconciliation with the mystery of a universe that exceeds our power of understanding facilitates not only the renunciation of the pride of rational knowledge that claims to encompass the ontic totality, but also the pious turning toward the self, a turning that brings us closer to *poetic expression* as confession, as a testimony of the spirit to itself. In the face of this new conception, the old Cartesian belief that humanity could achieve full control over nature proves to be unjustified. Novalis's *magical idealism*, a conception that distances itself from Cartesian rationalism, proposes an acceptance of the mystery of the world, a mystery we must respect both in its impenetrability to reason and in its openings in relation to experience and the expression of poetic philosophy. This is the idea to which Nietzsche will refer through the formula *amor fati*, the idea of accepting the world not under the oppressive sadness of irreversible pessimism, but under the force of the capacity to embrace reality. (Reid 2024, xxxi)

The overcoming of structural religious magic through an aesthetic-moral relation to the Divine

The constant reference to the themes of transcendence, the Absolute, beauty in itself, love, and eternity naturally brings Novalis closer to the theme of religion, transforming him into an author who combines the qualities of a Romantic poet with the traits of a thinker with strong mystical inclinations. *Hymns to the Night*, Novalis's celebrated work that accumulates a series of poems in which faith in the rebirth of authentic religion is poetically and philosophically presented, places its author in the constellation of writers who attempted the symbiosis between rigorous, conceptualized thought and the experience of authentic Christian faith understood according to the Kantian formula,

which tells us that where logical-rational investigation ends, faith begins. (Novalis 2024, 57-59) Novalis assumed the entire conceptual and personal experience complex resulting from such a choice. One of the resulting issues is faith in the uncertainty of future events. Whereas Enlightenment rationalism, and Kantian rationalism, led to the idea that humanity could advance in knowledge and self-perfection, with future history in the hands of human reason, Novalis's Romanticism is much more cautious and supports the reality of unpredictability, the truth of the incapacity to know the future, the fact that we are at the disposal of divine will, which for us is and will remain a mystery. *On Ordeals or the Judgment of God* is a work in which Novalis exposes these ideas, according to which the theme of destiny can be approached in a religious register, a perspective also influenced by the philosophical vision of history proposed by Herder. Attempting a transmutation of his vision of destiny in the *socio-political* sphere as well, Novalis elaborates the work *Christianity or Europe*, where he links the central points of his vision of religion in the form of a discourse that ultimately supports the values of medieval European Christianity in relation to the moral decadence brought about by the Enlightenment man's attempt to deny transcendence and anchor himself, with all his reality, in the sphere of materialism and immanent empirical experience. In this context, it can be stated that for Novalis, the Enlightenment, despite its enormous cultural revival effort, failed to annul the great antagonisms between dark prejudices and excessive rationalizations, between faith transformed into fanaticism and the rigid formalism of atheism. (Novalis 2024, 15-16) In Novalis's view, the path opened by the Enlightenment, that of denying the soul component of human beings, is equivalent to the rejection of *Spirit*, and this refusal paves not the way for human progress, but, on the contrary, for dehumanization. From this perspective, for Novalis, the problem of religion is the problem of philosophy insofar as the philosopher bears the responsibility of combating man's *forgetting* of Spirit, a formula later taken up in the twentieth century by Heideggerian metaphysical ontology, though referring to Being, the danger that awaits man anchored in temporality, *Dasein*, being precisely the *forgetting of Being* and confusing it with *beings*. Novalis can therefore also be considered a philosopher-poet who saw in the theme of religion not a simple metaphysical subject, but the fundamental theme of poetic contemplation, in the sense of relating consciousness to transcendence, not accidentally stating that religions are *the first attempts at philosophy*, (Novalis 2024, 49-50) the first elaborate searches of Spirit. Despite this spiritualist conception, it cannot be said that Novalis was an author who unconditionally accepted religious dogmas. On the contrary, he distances himself clearly from any intellectual dynamic that attempts to subjugate theology to thought.

(Reid 2024, xxxiv-xxxvi) His vision of the religious phenomenon is dominated by constant reference to *Spirit*, by the access and full openness of consciousness to Spirit. In this sense, it can be said that Novalis was a thinker of *spiritualist* character in the sense of Hegelian conceptualizations of Spirit. Thus, Novalis asserts that any book pulsating with the energy of Spirit, in which the power of Spirit manifests to elevate and ennoble the reader's consciousness, can be considered a Bible. At the same time, in Novalis's view, the imprint of holiness, in the sense of purity of the soul but also of aesthetic expression, can be found not only in Christian works of art but also in the great artistic masterpieces of Ancient Greece, observing the presence of this common denominator in paintings representing the Madonna and in depictions of the gods of Ancient Greece. (Reid 2024, xxxii) Divinity manifests in multiple forms of grace and favor that transcend the boundaries of the Christian religious dimension, and *art* represents, in Novalis's opinion, the highest framework for revealing the divine. Religion must be complete love and beauty, the harmony of ascent toward the absolute, regardless of dogmatic frameworks that attempt to diminish and control the experience of the thrill that calls consciousness toward the *Absolute*. Indeed, these dogmatic structures rush to discuss and offer definitions of God, which generates the opposite effect, namely distancing from divine mysteries. In this sense, Novalis maintained that his work would say nothing about God but would contemplate the *gods*, and this contemplation can only be poetic, *poetry* being one of the most direct paths to transcendence. In his view, it is a spiritual reality to require an intermediary between human consciousness and Divinity, and this intermediary can be the mediator (Novalis 2024, [frag. 73], 79), that would be the priest, can be the sacerdotal figure, but only in its authentic version, that is, as a *poet*. (Reid 2024, xxxiii)

Novalis asserts that in the beginning, priests were poets, the symbolic form, metaphor, parable, and allegory being the only way to mediate between divine will and the supplications of the faithful. Authentic priests, Novalis believes, did not limit themselves to the feeling of *sympathy* (as compassion) (Novalis 2024, 234-235) they lived the grace of openness to transcendence. Then, priests fell into the mirage of power and passions and drifted away from this high status of mediator between humans and gods, becoming *deceitful*. (Novalis 2024, 17-18) The poet, as a *transcendent physician*, (Novalis 2024, 126- 129) as Novalis calls him, must not stray from this sacred mission of being the great hermeneut, the one who ensures the flow and spiritual encounter between the Divine and mortals. Religion must not be a *social business*, Novalis believes; one cannot make agreements, bargains, or trivial exchanges with Spirit, of economic or political nature. On the contrary,

consciousness can ascend to the heights of Spirit only if it chooses to rise above all that the ephemeral daily life offers, to aim at or participate, in the Platonic sense, in the Absolute. And the philosopher-poet can ensure this high mediation. People must, according to Novalis, follow the voice of this mediator only freely; their consciousness must be capable of choosing the middle path so as not to advance alone on the road to the Absolute, but also not to trust blindly in false mediators of religions that have lost divine Grace. These views show the influence of Kantian ethical thought, which places major emphasis on the idea of human *freedom*, on the thesis of autonomy of consciousness. (Reid 2024, xxxiii) By adopting this position, Novalis does not deny the principles of Christian dogmatics, with all it encompasses, from the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception to the mystery of the Resurrection, but he considers that the sphere of Spirit's manifestation is much broader and cannot be confined to a few theological directions within Christianity. Piety and Christian revelation are therefore not rejected; on the contrary, their true axiomatic is restored by correlating them with *moral responsibility*, the assumption of sacrifice, and the high values of the *ethics of love*. For Novalis, the Divinity of morality is superior, in terms of his poetic philosophy, to the Divinity of dogma and the structural magic of religion. (Reid 2024, xxx, xxxiii-xxxiv)

Novalis – An Immortal Symbol of Romanticism. Major Echoes and Influences in Universal Culture. A Brief Conclusion

In his short life, which he describes in *Hymns to the Night* as a long and exhausting *pilgrimage*, at the end of which he felt a *celestial fatigue*, (Novalis 2024, 488) Novalis offered Western civilization a number of works that can be seen as spiritual openings, as open cultural inquiries, and as themes for future exploration across various fields, from metaphysics and ontology to theology and literature. All these pursuits were developed in the unmistakable form of a poetic philosophy or a philosophical form of poetic expression. As an early Romantic pathfinder of contemplative journeys, Novalis influenced the thought and style of Nietzsche as well as Heidegger in the twentieth century, without, however, succumbing to the destructive temptations of politically oriented discourse. Resonances of his poetic philosophy can also be found in authors such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, or in the essays of Carlyle. American Transcendentalists such as Emerson or Thoreau, authors of philosophical poetry such as the Englishman Owen Barfield, and major writers like T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien were, in turn, influenced by Novalis's work. (Reid 2024, xii) Even in the realm of political philosophy, Novalis left his mark. Marx, for example, an author who declared himself opposed to German

Romanticism, was indebted not only to Hegelian thought, from which he took the theme of dialectics and transferred it from the sphere of Spirit to that of socio-economic mobility, but also to Novalis's perspectives on the concepts of reconciliation and alienation, on unity as the resultant of the process of cohesion and final symbiosis. (Reid 2024, xii-xiii) "Philosophizing is only a threefold or double kind of *waking-being awake-consciousness*. [*Fragments and Studies: 1799–1800, #120*]." (Novalis apud Reid 2024, xxxv).

For Novalis, the most important concept remained the one he constantly emphasized under the influence of Plotinus's ancient ontology, namely the concept of *Unity*. Naturally, when referring to this ultimate term, some have called it *Spirit*, like Hegel, others *Being*, like Heidegger, and others God, as many theologians after Novalis have done. Regardless of these terminological differences, what matters, Novalis consistently maintains in his work, is the human capacity and choice to participate in *Transcendence* or to try to access the higher level of moral consciousness alongside the philosopher-poet, who "comes up steps untamed." (Novalis 2024, 392)

Notes

¹ First of all, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to James D. Reid who, in an absolutely remarkable way, interpreted, translated, and edited the work of Georg Friedrich Phillip von Hardenberg. Thus, in the present paper we will appeal to Reid, J.D. 2024. (ed. and trans.), *Novalis: Philosophical, Literary, and Poetic Writings*. Oxford University Press.

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