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Mental Illness as Irony: Hegel's Diagnosis of Novalis

Enfermedad mental como ironía: el diagnóstico de Hegel de Novalis

RESUMEN: Hegel lee al poeta Novalis como expresión de una ironía terminal, un caso patológico de *Gemüt*, en el que la mente consciente se aliena de la realidad y vuelca su negatividad hacia el interior, sobre los contenidos de su propia alma natural. La condición del sentimiento de sí mismo, presentada en la «Antropología» de Hegel, es un autoconsumo que se manifiesta somáticamente en la enfermedad física (tisis) de la que muere Novalis. La producción literaria del poeta representa una fijación patológica que impide la organicidad dinámica de la Ciencia hegeliana. Como tales, la enfermedad mental y la muerte de Novalis constituyen una expresión de la ironía romántica y una amenaza permanente para la filosofía de Hegel.

PALABRAS CLAVE: FIJACIÓN; CONSUMO; ALMA; SENTIMIENTO; ROMANTICISMO; INCONSCIENTE; DISCURSO

ABSTRACT: Hegel reads the poet Novalis as an expression of terminal irony, a pathological case of *Gemüt*, where the conscious mind is alienated from reality and turns its negativity inwards on the contents of its own natural soul. The condition of self-feeling, presented in Hegel's "Anthropology", is a self-consumption that manifests itself somatically in the physical disease (consumption) from which Novalis dies. The poet's literary production represents a pathological fixation that impedes the dynamic organicity of Hegelian Science. As such, Novalis's mental illness and death constitute an expression of romantic irony and an ongoing threat to Hegel's philosophy.

KEYWORDS: FIXATION; CONSUMPTION; SOUL; FEELING; ROMANTICISM; UNCONSCIOUSNESS; DISCOURSE

Hegel's critique of Early German Romanticism has repercussions that resonate to the very core of his work. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher and Novalis, all of whom collaborated on the review *Athenäum*, in Jena, from 1798 to 1800, haunt (anonymously) such pivotal figures of moral consciousness as the beautiful soul, unhappy consciousness, hypocrisy and evil.¹ The tone of this criticism in no way abates with age. On the contrary, its polemical nature becomes increasingly obvious in Hegel's later (Berlin) writings and lectures, more than twenty years after the Early Romantic movement's demise.

The principal reason for this, I believe, is that Hegel came to see the notion of romantic irony, primarily developed by Friedrich Schlegel but reflected through the "Symphilosophie"² of the Jena group, as a lasting threat to "Science", a subjectivist assault on the systematic articulation of scientific truth. In works dealing with Hegel's critique of romantic irony, his negative take on arbitrary, individual subjectivity is usually stressed.³ Indeed, as an expression of particular subjectivity, irony remains fixed in self-certainty. Consequently, to fully grasp its threat, irony must also be seen as an insult to what Hegel considers as true objectivity, i.e. spirit in its various forms: of course the organic state as an expression of concrete freedom but more crucially still, the forms of absolute spirit found in art, religion and ultimately science as it is recapitulated in the body of Hegelian philosophy.

In this light, it is easy to understand why most of Hegel's references to the Early Romantic movement concern Friedrich Schlegel, the central figure of the group and the principal theoretician of irony.⁴ Schleiermacher also occupies an important position, not only as the former's "disciple", friend and supporter, but for his own notion of feeling-based religion. The rivalry between Hegel and Schleiermacher at the University of Berlin, where they both taught, is well

[1] See E. Behler, "Fr. Schlegel und Hegel", *Hegel-Studien*, vol. 2, 1963, pp. 203-240, and E. Hirsch, "Die Beisetzung der Romantiker in Hegels Phänomenologie", *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 2, 1924, pp. 510-532.

[2] The term, invented by Friedrich Schlegel, refers to the intense, largely anonymous collaboration of *Athenäum's* main contributors: Schlegel himself, his brother Wilhelm, Novalis and Schleiermacher.

[3] For example, Otto Pöggeler in his important thesis *Hegels Kritik der Romantik* (Bonn: 1956). For a detailed account of Hegel's critique of Early German Romanticism, see Jeffrey Reid, *The Anti-Romantic: Hegel Against Ironic Romanticism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). For a shorter version: "Hegel's Critique of Romantic Irony" in Elizabeth Millan Brusslan and Judith Norman (eds.), *Brill's Companion to German Romantic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[4] Both Behler and Hirsch (*op.cit.*) associate F. Schlegel with "evil" in the *Phenomenology's* chapter on morality.

documented,⁵ and may partly explain why Hegel was convinced the romantic view had not simply died with the *Athenäum* review, in 1800.

The Novalis question is more delicate. The writings with which Hegel may have been familiar are sparse and display sensibilities that bear little resemblance to Schlegel's critical provocations or Schleiermacher's prophetic proclamations. The lyrical yearning of *Hymns to the Night*, the fantastical flights of *Henry of Ofterdingen*, Novalis's tragic, unrequited and highly idealized love for Sophie von Kühn, dead at the age of sixteen, and his own premature death of consumption at the age of twenty-nine all seem more appropriate to the English rather than the Early German romantic mould with its theories and practices of irony. Nonetheless, Novalis figure is crucial to Hegel's understanding of romantic irony, despite the fact the name "Novalis" appears only four times⁶ in Hegel's works (in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and in the "Review of Solger's Posthumous Writings and Correspondence"),⁷ and despite the distinctive (lyrical) nature of Novalis's writings. This essay cannot possibly deal with Hegel's criticism of romantic irony in general, nor extensively with his treatment of Novalis, which I undertake elsewhere (op. cit.). Here, I want to show how, for Hegel, Novalis represents a pathological form of romantic irony,⁸ and briefly explain how this can be perceived as a threat to Hegelian philosophy and its notion of objective truth.

The ironic form Hegel attributes to Novalis is only understandable in light of considerations on his individuality as such and the illness essential to it, one which stems from a pathological relation between the soul <Seele> and the understanding <Verstand>. More specifically, Novalis's death from "consumption" appears to Hegel as the ultimate manifestation of a mental illness, a psychiatric condition that has necessary somatic ramifications. It is important to establish these points since the pathological state and his resulting death from consumption are essential to understanding the particular form of irony that Hegel attributes to Novalis.

[5] For example, E.von der Luft, *Hegel, Hinrichs and Schleiermacher on Feeling and Religion*. Queenston: Mellen, 1987. See also Jeffrey Reid, "Hegel on Schleiermacher and Postmodernity" *Clio*, 32,4 (Summer 2003), p. 457-472.

[6] Hegel does not refer to Novalis by his real name: G.P.F. von Hardenberg.

[7] For a French translation and commentary on Hegel's Review of Solger's works, see Jeffrey Reid: Reid, Jeffrey, *G.W. F. Hegel, L'ironie romantique : Compte rendu hégélien des écrits posthumes et correspondance de K.W.F. Solger*. Paris: Vrin, 1997.

[8] In the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, after having related a first form of irony to Friedrich Schlegel, Hegel deals with "Die nächste Form dieser Negativität der Ironie", characterized by "die krankhafte Schönseelichkeit und Sehnsüchtigkeit", i.e. by Novalis. G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden [Werke]*, Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (eds.) vol.13. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970, p.96.

HEGEL'S DIAGNOSIS OF NOVALIS'S PSYCHIATRIC CONDITION

Hegel conceives of Novalis's mental illness⁹ in terms of a pathological relationship between soul and the conscious mind, also known as the understanding (*Verstand*). This relationship becomes apparent through an examination of how Hegel articulates the normal development of a sane individual. To present this development, which takes the form of a dialectic between soul and the understanding, two key concepts come into play: judgment (*Urteil*) in the etymological sense of an *Ur-teilen*, an original dividing or sharing out that is also a determining predicative act, and genius. Employing what might be described as a genealogical or even genetic line of argument to trace the development of the healthy adult relation between soul and understanding, Hegel goes back to the "original dividing" that occurs between the mother (subject) and the foetus (predicate). In this nascent relationship, the mother represents the determining "genius" of the foetus. As we are dealing with the soul, this dialectic takes place in the "Anthropology" section of "Subjective Spirit", in the "Philosophy of Spirit" of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*.¹⁰

Hegel's use of the term "genius" is significant in that it reveals the natural aspects involved in the first articulations between the soul and the understanding. Indeed, the soul must be grasped as spirit (mind) in itself, the universal moment of subjective spirit in its natural wholeness, or, in other words, the soul

[9] It should be stressed that while Hegel understands Novalis' personality as a pathological mental condition, Novalis himself appears to have been quite sane. Born into an aristocratic family, he studied law, mathematics, philosophy and chemistry, and later worked, for most of his (short) adult life in the administration of the salt mines. His literary works, however, attest to a highly imaginative, inspired, nostalgic and sensitive nature. For example, the poem "Yearning for Death" in the *Hymns* was apparently inspired by a vision Novalis experienced while spending a night on Sophie's tomb, where he saw his radiant beloved rise from the earth. These literary traits form the basis for Hegel's diagnosis.

[10] In the *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, the "Subjective Spirit" section is divided into three parts: Anthropology, Phenomenology and Psychology. The opposition between the first and third terms (reconciled through the second) indicates the way they were thought of during the first half of the 19th Century: anthropology was not yet understood as the science of "man" as a living totality, less yet in its current ethnological acceptation. At Hegel's time, anthropology was the science of the human soul and its innate faculties, prejudices etc. From this standpoint, anthropology was juxtaposed with psychology, the science of rational mind. While taking up this juxtaposition, Hegel nonetheless lends new meaning to the terms: anthropology is the study of the soul (*Seele*) as that which is natural (and immediate) in the human mind; the object of psychology is the fully rational mind, i.e. the soul that has become consciousness of the objective world. For discussions on Hegel's anthropology, see David S. Stern (ed.), *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013). The book contains several articles on "madness" in the Anthropology section, including my chapter, "How the Dreaming Soul Became the Feeling Soul, Between the 1827 and 1830 Editions of Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit: Empirical Psychology and the Late Enlightenment".

represents a human being's natural determinations. These include the human qualities that are part of "the universal life of nature",¹¹ the natural changes that occur throughout an individual's "ages of life,"¹² and finally, sensation (*Empfindung*). In these three contexts, the soul is represented as a universal substance, vegetative or passive, and above all, natural. However, within the present dialectic between soul and understanding, Hegel uses "genius" in a sense that, while incorporating its Kantian definition as an inborn (*ingenium*) talent applicable to art (Cf. the *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment*, sections 46 and 47), rediscovers the more original meaning of "a divinity presiding at birth". This "divinity" (i.e. a being that influences the destiny of another) is not exclusively attached to the natural instance of soul, but, through the dialectical encounter with the world, will come to associate itself with conscious understanding.

However, in the present context, the genius is defined, in general, as "a self-ish totality of spirit (*die selbstische Totalität des Geistes*), in so far as it exists for itself and forms the subjective substantiality of an other".¹³ The other is thus an accidental predicate, without substance, whose "being-for-self" is purely "formal".¹⁴ This "other" is the foetus. According to the relation between mother and foetus, the substantiality of the former stems from her fully developed and actual selfhood, from her "global totality of existence, of life, of character... as effectiveness and activity, as concrete subjectivity".¹⁵ On the other hand, the foetus within the mother is only "mere possibility or capacity or in-itself".¹⁶ At this level, the mother therefore determines the foetus through an action of *urteilen*, judging as an act of predication, where the mother-subject determines the foetus-predicate.

Hegel refers to this original predication by which the substantial mother-subject determines the foetus-predicate, as "magic".¹⁷ It is "neither corporal nor simply spiritual, but *psychical*"¹⁸, i.e. an immediate, mute relation that takes place within the realm of feeling. It is neither a "communication" nor a "material"¹⁹ bond, but an immediate sharing. The ambiguity of the mother-foetus relation stems from the fact that "these are two individuals, and yet in a still undivided unity of soul [*Seele*]"²⁰

[11] *Werke* 10, p.53.

[12] *Ibid.*, p.75.

[13] *Ibid.*, p.125.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] *Ibid.*, p.126.

[18] Hegel uses the term "*psychisch*". *Werke* 10, p.125.

[19] *Ibid.*, p.126.

[20] *Ibid.*, p.125.

Hegel conceives the magical action that the mother-subject has on the foetus-predicate as a kind of genetic sharing by which “the feminine nature”²¹ is “originally deployed in him” along with “predispositions to illness as well as other predispositions concerning configuration, sensitivity, character, talent, idiosyncrasies etc.”²² This genetic sharing does not mean that femininity per se is transferred to the foetus. In Hegel, “feminine” and “nature” are so closely associated that they are, in many cases, virtually synonymous. Briefly, according to Hegel’s strange genetics, all that is natural in the human soul is predicated there from the mother. However, according to the mother-child dialectic, the foetus, at first determined by the maternal genius, will subsequently, as developing child, adolescent etc. rise up to consciousness, to develop into “the rational genius, conscious of itself, determining”²³. Now, in the healthy, sane adult (male?) what the rational genius will in turn determine, according to its normal development, is precisely the “substantial material existing only in itself”²⁴, i.e. the pure natural soul that has been determined by the mother. In other words, the substance-subject that was the foetus’ mother is incorporated into the child as a predicate, which will now be determined by its own understanding consciousness. This predicate (“the feminine nature”) is the soul of the conscious being, the natural human soul, all its inner dispositions, predispositions, characteristics.

However, for the same reasons that the twin concepts of *urteilen* and genius are crucial to the development of the healthy conscious mind, which may now determine the natural soul as its predicate, they are also at the root of potential pathological psychiatric disorders. In fact, the immediacy involved in the “magical” relationship of original predication or sharing between conscious understanding and the soul means that their relationship tends to be unstable. This instability and the fact that genius can attach itself to either the soul or the understanding represent the conditions in which an inversion or a regression may occur, where the insurgent soul now assumes the role of the determining genius, the role that originally belonged to the mother-substance-subject.²⁵

[21] *Ibid.* This does not mean “femininity”, but rather “nature that is feminine”.

[22] *Werke* 10, pp.125-126. These “genetics” can be summarized as follows: the natural characteristics and predispositions of the soul are deployed, by predication, from the mother to the child (Hegel refers to “him”); the development and formation of these attributes will be the result of the father’s educational efforts. The first instance of this formation is “habit”, an intermediary stage in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, between soul and consciousness.

[23] *Werke* 10, p.126.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] This idea of mental illness fits into the tradition of “hysteria”, understood as an essentially feminine “disturbance of the womb”.

This state of affairs is obviously pathological, since in the healthy rational adult it is conscious understanding that constitutes the determining genius (of the soul). The opposite movement, which takes the unconscious soul for the genius, for substantial subjectivity, and understanding for a determinable and accidental predicate brings about the “manifestation [*Erscheinung*]” of a “condition known as the *heart* or *soul* [*Gemüt*]”.²⁶

In a short passage from his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel explicitly attributes the *Gemüt* condition to Novalis, and goes on describe it as a “consumption of the mind”.

“Thus, for example, Novalis, one of the noblest souls [*Gemüter*] who found themselves at this standpoint, was pushed to a complete lack of all determined interest, to this fear of reality [*Wirklichkeit*], and driven to this sort of consumption of the mind [*dieser Schwindsucht gleichsam des Geistes*].”²⁷

Besides relating the *Gemüt* condition specifically to Novalis and alluding to it in terms of “consumption [*Schwindsucht*]”²⁸ (which expresses itself physically, as I will show), the passage brings to light another crucial aspect: this condition involves a certain attitude towards objective reality or *Wirklichkeit*. Indeed, this is brought clearly into focus in the sentence preceding the cited text, which refers to the *Gemüt* condition as a “yearning [*Sehnsucht*] of the soul [*des Gemütes*] instead of effective action and being”.²⁹ The immediate relationship I referred to above (between soul and understanding) is exclusive of objective reality. As Hegel puts it, the non-mediated individuality of the *Gemüt* condition remains “different from the existing deployment of its consciousness, its representation of the world, its interests, inclinations, etc.”³⁰

The absolute solipsism of the individual who shuns “effective action and being” has important implications for the way we are to grasp conscious understanding in this “pathological” context. As detached or alienated from objectivity, or as non-mediated, understanding remains abstract, i.e. it operates in the purely formal manner Hegel ascribes to the categories of subjective

[26] *Ibid.*, p.127.

[27] *Werke* 13, p.211. Here, as in other appropriate contexts, I translate “*Geist*” as “mind” rather than “spirit”.

[28] The fact that Novalis died of consumption (*Schwindsucht*) allows Hegel to play on the term, particularly since the German word, through the verb “*schwinden*” (= to fade away, to die etc.), might be taken literally as “yearning for death”, which is the title of the last section in Novalis’ *Hymns to the Night*: “*Sehnsucht nach dem Tode*”. As we will see, the English term “consumption” is appropriate in that it evokes subjectivity’s “aspiration” for content, particularly when cut off from the world.

[29] *Werke* 13, p.211.

[30] *Werke* 10, p.126.

(Kantian) idealism, devoid of true, objective content. In fact, the only “objectivity” available for the alienated understanding, its only content, is its own (internal) intuitions. The lack of anchoring (or mediation) in the real world also explains the instability I mentioned above, where the relationship between soul and alienated understanding brings about the spontaneous eruption of “pathological mental conditions”.³¹ It is significant that Hegel sees such conditions in terms of a regression to an earlier stage of development, where a “truer form of mind [exists] within a more subordinate form”³², or, where “the soul’s development, already arrived, in its ulterior determination, at consciousness and understanding, can again sink”³³.

As I have shown, the *Gemüt* condition is defined as one in which the soul (*Seele*) determines the understanding. We now see that, as alienated from objective reality, the latter has only the former to draw upon for its content. This content is therefore one of pure interior feeling, radically dissociated from the external world. Abstract understanding therefore becomes entirely inward-directed, and as purely formal subjectivity finds itself overwhelmed by the inner feeling that it relies upon for content. As Hegel puts it, the hitherto conscious self is reduced to “simple ideality, the subjectivity of feeling”.³⁴ Hegel describes this primitive form of subjectivity as the “feeling soul” and it is in this context that the pathological condition of *Gemüt* appears.³⁵ More precisely, reduced to “simple ideality”, which Hegel defines as the “negation of the real”³⁶, the feeling soul can do nothing but negate its own internal content or turn its own negativity inward on itself. In the healthy, outward directed consciousness, *external* content, for example, the worldly content of the senses or the will, is negated and preserved in the mind, “virtually retained, although it does not exist”³⁷. Such a well of experience forms a the “determinationless pit”³⁸ of

[31] *Ibid.*, p.124.

[32] *Ibid.*

[33] *Ibid.* Hegel’s text also claims that the soul or the unconscious can only be understood through the analysis of pathological conditions; this seems to prefigure modern psychoanalysis. Hegel drew inspiration from Mesmer’s research on “magnetic somnambulism” (hypnosis), an induced state Hegel considered as pathological. See *Encyclopedia* §406.

[34] *Werke* 10, p.122.

[35] *Fuhlende Seele*. *Werke* 10, p.122. In the 1827 version of the *Encyclopedia*, “the feeling soul” was entitled “the dreaming soul”. Also, only in the 1830 version (which I am using) does Hegel distinguish fully between “*empfinden*” (to feel sensations) and “*fühlen*” (to feel sentiments). For the significance of this shift, and its relation to Schleiermacher, see the above-mentioned book chapter, “How the Dreaming Soul Became the Feeling Soul etc”.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] *Ibid.*

“representations, knowledge, thoughts”³⁹ and memories upon which conscious understanding can draw. In the state of *Gemüt*, however, this internal content becomes the presiding genius, imposing itself on the alienated consciousness understanding so that the subject becomes both content and negativity (form). The only “real” to be negated is therefore the subject itself.

I am arguing that this action explains the “consumption of the mind” Hegel attributes to Novalis. Following this line of thought, the description of the *Gemüt* condition that Hegel attributes to Novalis in the *Aesthetics*, as the “yearning [*Sehnsucht*] of the soul instead of effective action”, reflects the same inward directed negativity that I have brought to light in through reference to the Feeling Soul in the *Encyclopedia*: the subject whose only content is itself. The fact that yearning is essentially desire, and that desire is itself an expression of subjective negativity only serves to reinforce this assertion. I am not concerned here with the ramifications of yearning as they may pertain to figures of the unhappy consciousness and the beautiful soul in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. What is important to my argument is that the pathology of *Gemüt* is defined as inward directed negativity, exclusive of any extension, or mediation, in the field of effectivity. How this attitude represents an expression of irony, and a threat to true objectivity, will be dealt with in the third part of this essay.

NOVALIS'S PHYSICAL ILLNESS AND DEATH

The question here is whether or not to take Hegel literally when he describes Novalis's condition as a “consumption of the mind”. I am maintaining that Hegel does not simply use the term “consumption” metaphorically⁴⁰, but claims that Novalis's physical consumptive condition (his tuberculosis), resulting in his death, is the manifestation of his mental state. This view is supported by Hegel's conception of the relation between mental and physical illness in general.

Mental disturbance must be grasped essentially as an illness that is both mental and physical, because in it reigns the unity of the subjective and the objective, still entirely immediate, that has not yet passed through infinite mediation... - consequently, this feeling configures itself as a *being*, therefore as something physical [*Leiblich*].⁴¹

The fact that mental disturbance must take on a “bodily” [*leiblich*] “figure” [*Gestalt*], or that it must be understood as both mental and physical

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] “The illness of the soul <...> is not merely to be *compared* with physical illness but is more or less attached to it.” *Werke* 10, p.139. Addition to §406.

[41] *Werke* 10, p.169. In anachronistic terms, we are dealing with a psychosomatic illness.

illness, does not necessarily establish a causal link between the former and the latter; it does mean, however, that mental illness “in itself” becomes “for us” (i.e. “grasped” [*gefasst*]) when it becomes objectively manifest in the realm of worldly particularity, of the individual for-itself. In a way, we can say that “for us” the physical manifestations are symptomatic of a certain mental state. I am purposefully using the “conceptual” terms “in-itself” and “for-itself” to illustrate the Hegelian train of thought, and to underline the fact that, in terms of conceptual movement, the third, reconciling moment is missing: “in-and-for-itself”. As opposed to this movement, the pathological condition in question represents a state [*Zustand*] of arrested development, a mental fixation. Before returning to this idea, however, another question needs to be dealt with if we are to relate Hegel’s general statement on mental and physical illness to Novalis. How can the *Gemüt* condition, which is characterized as pure, inward directed subjectivity and the exclusion of all objectivity fit the above-quoted definition of mental illness as a state in which “the unity of the subjective and the objective” reigns? To answer this question, we must evoke the Hegelian notion of “bodilyness [*Leiblichkeit*]”.

Although, as we have seen, the feeling soul knows no external difference stemming from the operation of the outward-directed understanding, it nonetheless has the intimate, mute feeling of its *own* externality, i.e. of its own body. Hegel refers to this primordial feeling of externality as “bodilyness”⁴². It is “contained” within the feeling soul without yet being represented as a thing “for consciousness and understanding”. Bodilyness is not yet represented as a “materiality whose elements are exterior to each other and which is exterior to the soul”⁴³. In other words, at this level of the feeling soul, the subject has inklings of objectivity, but which are unrepresented and unexpressed. As was the case in the genealogical development between soul and consciousness that I outlined above, here again it is a matter of *Urteilen*, in the sense of an original division. The two visions are coherent since, for Hegel, both soul and bodilyness are purely natural, unconscious⁴⁴ instances, immediately related to the first articulations of mind or inward directed conscious understanding. In fact, as

[42] *Werke* 10, p.123.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] The link between the unconscious soul and the body is already present in Leibniz’s idea of *petites perceptions*, i.e. unconscious sensations acting on the body and thereby determining (or inscribing themselves upon) the soul. The modern idea of the unconscious can perhaps be attributed to Schelling, who applied it, in particular, to artistic creation in its relation to nature as a source, i.e. nature is unconscious but tending toward consciousness. The human body, as part of nature, is constitutive of the human unconscious. Although there are similarities with Hegel’s idea of the unconscious soul (its roots in nature, its bodilyness), there are also important differences. While Schelling considers the unconscious to be at the origin of all conscious expression, Hegel is more

we have seen, inward directed, purely abstract understanding is nothing more than self-feeling⁴⁵. Thus, the feeling soul is this unity: the pure categories of understanding turned inward on its bodiliness. As subjectivity, it feels (and negates) its own objectivity. It is at once feeling and felt. The “determinationless pit” that I mentioned above, is anchored in the body, which now perversely predicates the consciousness mind.

This original division operative at the most fundamental level of the the Hegelian “I” is absolutely essential to comprehending his idea of consciousness, in general. It explains the restlessness that pushes subjectivity to deploy itself into objectivity, into self-consciousness, reason and spirit. Even when grasped in its primitive, pre-conscious form, as outlined in the Anthropology section of “Subjective Spirit”, the subjective unity of selfhood already contains its difference, though immediately, within itself. It is the non-mediated nature of this relation that explains why mental illness, as a fixation at this stage, is immediately physical, why in it “reigns the unity of the subjective and the objective, still entirely immediate, that has not yet passed through infinite mediation”⁴⁶.

Above, I described the *Gemüt* condition as a state in which the soul determined all content for the inward directed understanding. We now see that this condition should be comprehended as pure self-feeling, which Hegel describes in terms of the Feeling Soul in the *Encyclopedia's* Anthropology section. Linking the *Gemüt* condition to mental disturbance in general has also shown a coincidence between the natural instances of soul and bodiliness: they represent the (natural) content of self-feeling. We thus comprehend why Hegel, in the passage quoted above, describes mental disturbance as a “feeling”, and how a consumption of the mind, where the soul is consumed (negated) as content, is also a consumption of the body, where bodiliness is consumed as content.

Hegel understands illness, in general, in terms of separation and fixation.⁴⁷ Expressing this in the conceptual terms I used above, a separation or division (*Urteilen*) has occurred between the “in itself” (universal) moment and the “for itself” (particular) moment, but here the conceptual movement has become arrested. This is unhealthy because life in general, and spiritual life in particular, is the organic movement of the whole. In Novalis's case,

Platonic (or Freudian) by also thinking of the unconscious in terms of things first experienced, then forgotten (or repressed).

[45] The same is true when abstract understanding receives external intuitions (Kantian phenomena) in a purely empirical way, as immediate sense perceptions. Because of their non-mediated nature, Hegel also includes these in the realm of subjective feeling.

[46] *Werke* 10, p.169.

[47] For example, see the addition to §406 in the *Encyclopedia. Werke* 10, p.139.

the separation between the unconscious soul and abstract understanding has become blocked from further development, and therefore from the possibility of recovery. According to Hegel, Novalis found himself locked in a position of mental self-negation which manifested itself physically, resulting in death. Thus, in his “Review of Solger’s Posthumous Writings and Correspondence”, Hegel writes: “[Self-feeling] struck the noble youth [i.e. Novalis] to the very core, with such precision, one might say, that ... this consumption of the mind carried itself out throughout the body [*Leiblichkeit*] and consequently determined its fate.”⁴⁸

More generally, regarding the possibility of recovery, which I mentioned above, it is worth mentioning that the very bodilyness of mental illness allows for its treatment *through* the body, an idea that Hegel develops from the idiosyncratic “empirical psychology” of his time. While cautioning against cruel and authoritarian treatments, in the lengthy Addition to the Philosophy of Subjective Spirit’s *Encyclopedia* section 408, Hegel does celebrate the bodily cures of a Scottish farmer, “well-known for curing fools” by “yolking them by the half dozen to a plough, and working them until they were tired out”. A gentler “remedy acting primarily on the body” is the swing. There, “the insane person becomes giddy by moving backwards and forwards... so that his fixed ideas are loosened up”.⁴⁹ Before passing anachronistic judgment, we should recall that treating mental illness through the body remains the foundational principle of today’s pharmaceutical approach to psychiatry.

NOVALIS’S ILLNESS AND DEATH AS IRONIC EXPRESSION

At the beginning of this article, I presented the ironic form particular to Novalis (according to Hegel) in terms of a pathological relationship between the soul and conscious understanding. We have seen how this relation is determined as a fixation at (or regression to) a pre-conscious stage, where understanding is abstract and inward directed, a pure ideality (or negativity) which relies solely on internal content. This is the self-certainty I alluded to in the introduction. However, I also claimed that Hegel defines romantic irony in general as a threat to true objectivity. The question is therefore how Novalis’s condition meets this criterium.

As we have seen, the content of *Gemüt* is purely subjective, coming from the interior; all external, objective content mediated by outward directed

[48] *Werke* 11, p.267.

[49] *Werke* 10, p. 181. In the above-mentioned book chapter (How the Dreaming Soul etc.), I show how Hegel derives much of the content of the *Encyclopedia*’s treatment of mental illness from a course he took at Tübingen, offered by the Professor Flatt, and from popular accounts of “empirical psychology” published at the time. Hegel also refers to the work of Pinel, and his crucial insight that “madness” was an illness that could, in fact, be treated.

understanding is thus excluded since this type of understanding is missing. Healthy, outward directed understanding represents the subject's first opening to the world, through which the "subject reflected in itself"⁵⁰ attains consciousness of others and of itself, grasps substantial content and learns. The *Gemüt*, in its self-consumption, cuts itself off from all objectivity and, therefore, from participation in the concrete life of spirit. This is why Novalis finds himself "pushed to the complete lack of all determined interest, to this fear of reality [*Wirklichkeit*]"⁵¹. Novalis's death is the ultimate expression of this lack of interest.

While the lack of interest in the substantial reality of spirit is necessary to the Hegelian definition of romantic irony, it is not sufficient. Irony is not only "the emptiness of all that is concrete [*Sachlichen*], ethical [*Sittlichen*] and that has substantial content [*Gehaltvollen*], the nullity of all that is objective and of positive value"⁵², it is the performative affirmation of this emptiness and nullity. Briefly, Novalis's illness and death must be grasped as a such an affirmation in order to be construed as a threat to objective truth, which is how Hegel defines romantic irony.

Obviously, Hegel does not maintain that any individual pathologically uninterested in the substantial life of spirit is a romantic ironist, even if this lack of interest is carried to the point of consumption and death. Indeed, the attitude and even the death of most individuals, from whatever cause, are, in themselves, philosophically insignificant. This is not the case with Novalis. His life and death are significant because, as an artist of some note who participated in the *Athenäum* journal, he was able to "configure his life artistically"⁵³. Hegel takes this romantic tenet seriously, the idea that one's own life and way of living should be conceived of as an artform. Novalis's pathological mental condition and death can be taken in this way precisely because they form the substance of his literary expressions, as performatively posited in his fragmentary and yearningly nihilistic works. As a discourse fundamentally contradictory to the concrete *logos* of Hegelian philosophy that Novalis shows himself to be an ironic expression. Had he remained silent, he would not have mattered.

As an expression of mental illness, Novalis's ironic productions must also be regarded as a fixation, an *idée fixe*, not simply in relation to the individual but to the life of spirit itself, grasped as an essentially organic movement of the whole. In this light, ironic discourse, as a significant expression of non-participatory stasis, must be seen as a threat to the system's dynamic integrity, not

[50] *Werke* 10, p.124.

[51] *Lectures on Aesthetics*, *Werke* 13, p.211.

[52] *Ibid.*, p.96.

[53] *Ibid.*, p.94.

only in the negative sense of failing to contribute, but in the positive sense of inhibiting. Ironic expression therefore stands in marked contrast to how Hegel conceives of true artistic activity, as participating in the organic life of spirit, and forming, itself, an aspect of concrete *logos*. True art is not ironical. As an expression where human and absolute spirit comeingle, it is fundamentally serious.

For true seriousness [in art] comes only from a substantial interest, from subject matter [*Sache*] that is, in itself, full of substantial content, of truth, of ethical life... so that I myself become essential for myself, to the extent that I plunge into this content, and merge with it in all my knowledge and action.⁵⁴

Novalis's pathological mental condition and death is only significant in that it represents an assertion against, and a threat to, ethical life, spirit, and ultimately to (systematic, Hegelian) philosophy. This is why Hegel takes him into account. However, the fact that Hegel finds it necessary, in his later Berlin works, to return polemically to Novalis and the other romantic ironists of the *Athenäum* review seems to show that the fixated threat that they represent proves curiously resistant to the *Aufhebung* of speculative thought and the cure it offers.

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