

## ARTICLE

# ON ‘THE RELIGION OF THE VISIBLE UNIVERSE’: NOVALIS AND THE PANTHEISM CONTROVERSY

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The ‘Pantheism Controversy’ of the 1780s was one of the most significant events in German intellectual life in the eighteenth century, and its reverberations continued to be felt in various ways for decades to come.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the great flowering of philosophy that began in the 1790s and which is associated with both early Romanticism and the rise of post-Kantian idealism is scarcely intelligible outside the context created by the ‘Pantheism Controversy’. Even Wilhelm Dilthey’s ‘theory of world-views’, developed over a century after the fires of the debate had abated, reflects the legacy of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’.<sup>2</sup> The leading luminaries of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth German letters, people such as Herder, Goethe, Hegel, Schelling and Schleiermacher, all, in one way or another, were shaped by the ‘Pantheism Controversy’.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For a recent account of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ and its significance for the development of modern German philosophy, see Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987) 44–83. For another account that locates this debate firmly within the history of the reception of Spinoza by German intellectuals in the eighteenth century, see David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany from 1670 to the Age of Goethe* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1984).

<sup>2</sup>Dilthey deploys a conceptual scheme involving three rival ‘world-views’, naturalism, the ‘idealism of freedom’ and ‘objective idealism’, as a way of understanding the history of philosophy. The ‘idealism of freedom’ is identified with traditional theism and F. H. Jacobi, the central figure in the ‘Pantheism Controversy’, is listed as an advocate of this ‘world-view’ (see *Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 8: Weltanschauungslehre: Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie* (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1960) 108). ‘Objective idealism’, on the other hand, the view with which Dilthey is most sympathetic, is associated with the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, Spinoza, Goethe, Hegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher (ibid., 113–14). Goethe, Hegel, Schelling and Schleiermacher all responded in various ways to the ‘Pantheism Controversy’. For Dilthey’s sympathy with ‘objective idealism’ see my ‘Dilthey’s Philosophy of Religion in the “Critique of Historical Reason (1880–1910)”’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66 (2005) 265–83. The classic case is made in Otto F. Bollnow, *Dilthey: Ein Einführung in seine Philosophie*, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1955).

<sup>3</sup>On Herder and Goethe, see David Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*; on Schelling and Goethe, see Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); on Schleiermacher, see Albert L. Blackwell, *Schleiermacher’s Early Philosophy of Life: Determinism, Freedom, and Phantasy* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982) and especially Julia A. Lamm, *The Living God:*

Scholarly attention has recently begun to be re-focused on both the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ itself and on its impact on German philosophy. One figure, however, whose relationship to the debates of the 1780s has not been fully explored, is Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known by his pseudonym ‘Novalis’.<sup>4</sup> Like many in his generation, Novalis responded to Jacobi’s revelation of Lessing’s alleged ‘Spinozism’ with enthusiasm and interest. In his voluminous philosophical writings, Novalis attempts to come to grips with the troubled legacy of ‘Spinozism’. The aim of this paper is to examine this attempt, which provides a kind of unifying framework for Novalis’s work between 1795 and his early death in 1801. For Novalis, the attraction of Spinozism lay in its consonance with his own deepest religious intuitions. At the same time, he rejects Spinoza’s naturalism. The result is an ambitious synthesis of Spinozistic pantheism and traditional Christianity, which Novalis dubs ‘the religion of the visible universe’. This represents Novalis’s unique contribution to the continued attempts to resolve the legacy of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’.

My discussion begins with an examination of Novalis’s *favourable* reception of Spinoza and Spinozism. I argue that this favourable reception is motivated by both (1) a religious interest and (2) a metaphysical interest. Next, I document Novalis’s *critical* response to one central aspect of Spinozism, i.e. the naturalistic conception of God. In the third section of the essay, I argue that Novalis’s subsequent reception of the work of Frans Hemsterhuis and of Plotinus points him in the direction of a new standpoint capable of reconciling Spinozistic naturalism and theism. In the concluding section, I give an account of the basic structure of this new position. My aim throughout is to motivate a renewed appreciation for the distinctiveness of Novalis’s philosophical system as a response to the ‘Pantheism Controversy’.

## 1. NOVALIS AND ‘SPINOZA’: THE RECEPTION

Like many intellectuals who came of age in Germany in the 1790s, Novalis frequently invokes the name of Spinoza. As a student in Jena, Novalis was

*Schleiermacher’s Theological Appropriation of Spinoza* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996). On the impact of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ on German idealism, particularly on Hegel, see Dale Everts Snow, ‘F. H. Jacobi and the Development of German Idealism’, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987) 397–415 and Peter Jonkers, ‘The Importance of the Pantheism-Controversy for the Development of Hegel’s Thought’, *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 11 (2002) 272–78.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick C. Beiser, alone among recent commentators, has fully recognised the importance of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ from the early Romantic movement that includes Novalis. See *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003) 171–86. However, Beiser views Romantic metaphysics *not* as an attempt to respond to the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ as such but rather as an attempt to synthesise the conflicting standpoints of Spinoza and Fichte. See, *ibid.*, 178–80.

already familiar with one of the central texts of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’, Jacobi’s *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*.<sup>5</sup> Whether or not he made a detailed study of Spinoza’s writings (and there is no evidence that he did), Novalis shared his generation’s enthusiasm for a philosopher once reviled as an atheist.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Herder and Schleiermacher, Novalis never applied himself to the arduous if rewarding task of *understanding* Spinoza’s much-misunderstood system in its own terms. Thus, the question of whether or not Novalis properly understood Spinoza is not presently at issue. ‘Spinoza’ and ‘Spinozism’ function as ciphers for rather indefinite set of philosophical commitments that were more or less shared by Lessing, Herder, Friedrich Schlegel, Hölderlin, Hegel, Schelling and Schleiermacher. While Novalis had little to say about the *actual* Spinoza, he was certainly occupied with the ‘Spinoza’ and the ‘Spinozism’ that characterised his contemporaries. The aim of this section is to document Novalis’s abiding interest in Spinoza, and to suggest several reasons for this interest.<sup>7</sup>

In a letter to Friedrich Schlegel (8 July 1796), Novalis expresses his growing dissatisfaction with Fichte’s ‘transcendental philosophy’. At this stage, he finds the figure of Spinoza much more congenial to his own intellectual trajectory. He writes:

I constantly feel in everything that I am the sublime member of a wonderful whole – into which I grow, and which should become the fullness of my I – and must I not suffer everything gladly in order to love, to love more than just the physical form that is eight spans long, and to love longer than the vibrations of the strings of life? Spinoza and Zinzendorf grasped it, the infinite idea of love . . . Sadly, I see none of this view in Fichte.

(IV, 187–8)

<sup>5</sup>Novalis refers to the 1789 edition of this famous work in a letter of April 1791 to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. See *Novalis: Schriften*, edited by R. Samuel, H.-J. Mähl and G. Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988) Vol. 4, p. 85. All references to Novalis are to *Novalis: Schriften*, edited by Richard Samuel *et al.*, 4 vols (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–88). The citations begin with a fragment number (following a §), a Roman numeral indicating the volume, and the page number(s). Where applicable, I have relied upon the recent translation of the ‘*Fichte-Studien*’, *Novalis: Fichte Studies*, edited by Jane Kneller, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). The pagination of the latter volume is given following a semicolon.

<sup>6</sup>For a compelling portrait of the enthusiasm for Spinoza in the 1790s, see Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 174–5. David Bell captures the traditional negative image of Spinoza thus: ‘This then is the general picture of Spinoza given by his antagonists: atheism, fatalism, pantheism and materialism, portrayed in a way that results in a morally abhorrent and philosophically absurd world-view.’ See *Spinoza in Germany*, 6.

<sup>7</sup>In the remainder of the essay, I use the terms ‘Spinoza’ and ‘Spinozism’ interchangeably to refer both to the *actual* Spinoza and his views, and to the somewhat different versions of both that were popularised by the ‘Pantheism Controversy’.

Here, Novalis introduces his profession of interest in Spinoza by giving a rough outline of his own characteristic religious intuitions. Anticipating Schleiermacher's *Über Religion* by three years, Novalis testifies to how he 'feels' that he is part of a 'wonderful whole'. He further identifies this basic religious intuition with 'love'. Novalis expresses this position later in 'Vermischte Bemerkungen' or 'Blüthenstaub', indicating that it remains a stable part of his overall outlook.<sup>8</sup> Thus, what attracts Novalis to Spinoza is his perception of the latter's harmonizing with his own deepest religious sensibilities. This is suggested also by his coupling of Spinoza with Count Zinzendorf, founder of the Herrnhut community of Moravian Pietists. Radical Pietists had, for almost a century, adopted a kind of crypto-Spinozism rooted in their own pantheistic intuitions.<sup>9</sup> That Novalis can so easily link the arch-rationalist Spinoza with Zinzendorf testifies to the fact that his interest in Spinoza includes a significant religious component.<sup>10</sup> For Novalis, Spinozism became much more than an issue of either rehabilitating a long reviled figure in early modern philosophy or of correctly understanding Lessing's esoteric theological views. Instead, as his early reference to Spinoza alongside Zinzendorf suggests, Novalis is primarily interested in working out his *own* religious views.

In the '*Fichte-Studien*', however, which were partially composed during this same period (1795–6), Novalis's remarks suggest that there were also other motives, alongside this religious one, behind his interest in Spinoza. In particular, Novalis seems attracted to Spinoza's use of God as a first principle in his metaphysics, and to the possibility that this might provide a way past the dualisms inherited from modern philosophy such as 'mind and matter' and 'spirit and nature'.<sup>11</sup> For example, in §8, Novalis suggests that 'God' can be used as a name for a 'sphere' that encompasses both the Fichtean 'I' and 'Non-I', i.e. both 'spirit' and 'nature' (II, 107; 7).<sup>12</sup> Later on, in §§71–3, Novalis gives indications that 'God' is to be made into the first principle of his own philosophical system (II, 143–4; 41–2). The most 'Spinozistic' passage in the '*Fichte-Studien*' is undoubtedly §126, where Novalis rejects an 'anthropomorphic' deity in asserting that 'God is neither

<sup>8</sup>See §82:

In most religious systems we are considered as members of the divinity, which, when they do not heed the impulses of the whole, when, acting unintentionally against the laws of the whole, they go their own way and do not want to be members, are treated medically by the divinity – either healed in a painful way, or cut off.

(II, 450)

<sup>9</sup>See Bell, *Spinoza in Germany*, 17–19.

<sup>10</sup>Beiser offers a compelling account of the radical *Lutheran* aspects of the eighteenth-century reception of Spinoza. See *The Fate of Reason*, 48–52.

<sup>11</sup>Beiser also suggests this *metaphysical* motive as a reason for Novalis' enthusiasm for Spinoza. See *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 416–17.

<sup>12</sup>This idea reappears much later in these notes in §536, where Novalis writes that 'God in the proper sense' is 'the common sphere of object and subject' (II, 263; 160).

free nor moral' (II, 154; 52). In the *'Fichte-Studien'*, Novalis's attraction to Spinoza is motivated by (a) his attempt to overcome the unsatisfactory dualisms of modern philosophy and (b) his attempt to address the recent quest for a 'first principle' for a post-Kantian philosophical system.<sup>13</sup>

Spinoza and Spinozism were apparently attractive to Novalis for two distinct reasons. First of all, Spinoza's conception of the 'intellectual love of God', as well as his pantheism, were consonant with Novalis's basic religious convictions. The latter were, obviously, not particularly constrained by orthodoxy. At the same time, as his reference to Zinzendorf suggests, Novalis still located his own views within the domain of Christianity. Secondly, Novalis was attracted by the possibility that Spinozism might be able to reconcile some of the basic intellectual conflicts of the day, and that Spinoza's 'God' might provide the first principle for a philosophical system that had been sought by both Reinhold and Fichte.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. NOVALIS AND SPINOZA: THE CRITICAL RECEPTION

While Novalis shared his generation's enthusiasm for Spinoza, he certainly cannot be labelled a Spinozist in any straightforward sense. Even quite early on in his intellectual development, there are suggestions that his attitude towards Spinoza and Spinozism was not entirely admiring. Novalis was by no means an uncritical recipient of the Spinozist tradition in German intellectual circles. This is certainly a point of difference between Novalis and a figure such as Schelling, whose early *Naturphilosophie* was much closer to actual Spinozism than anything Novalis ever wrote.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the degree of Novalis's reservations about total Spinozism can be gauged from his critical remarks about Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in his correspondence with A. W. and Friedrich Schlegel (IV, 230, 239, 242–3). In a letter to

<sup>13</sup>On this latter aspect of early post-Kantian thought, see Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 96–104, 107–9. These *metaphysical* motivations for 'Spinozism' resurface in one of the so-called 'Logological Fragments' of 1797–8. Novalis asserts that 'The association of Spinozism and hylozoism would bring about the unification of materialism and theism' (II, 529). Similarly, in some of his last writings in the *Allgemeine Brouillon* (1798–99), he speaks favourably of 'Spinozism' at several points (§§914, 958; III, 443, 451). Spinoza's conception of 'God' appears here as well (§1098; III, 469).

<sup>14</sup>According to Beiser, the main attraction of Spinozism for the Romantic generation was Spinoza's 'attempt to rationalize religion'. As he puts it: 'Spinoza's famous dictum *deus sive natura*, his identification of God with the infinitude of nature, seemed to resolve the conflict between reason and faith, which had preoccupied philosophers and theologians throughout the Enlightenment' (see *The Romantic Imperative*, 175). While Novalis would, no doubt, have welcomed such an achievement, he nowhere indicates that he appreciated Spinoza for harmonizing modern scientific rationality and traditional religion.

<sup>15</sup>On Novalis's reaction to Schelling's Spinozistic *Naturphilosophie*, see Beiser, *German Idealism*, 429.

Caroline Schlegel of 9 September 1798, he also registers his growing dissatisfaction with Schelling's Spinozistic concept of the 'world-soul', which figured so prominently in the early writings on *Naturphilosophie*.<sup>16</sup>

The '*Fichte-Studien*', composed prior to this encounter with Schelling, also contains suggestions of a movement away from strict Spinozism. Novalis's hesitation seems to be based on Spinoza's thoroughgoing *naturalism*.<sup>17</sup> In §151, Novalis observes that 'Spinoza ascended as far as nature – Fichte to the I, or the person. I [ascend] to the thesis God' (II, 157; 55). Here, Novalis challenges Spinoza's famous *deus sive natura* quite explicitly. He takes Spinoza's *deus sive natura* for what it, in fact is, namely, a radical departure from traditional theism that amounts to a *naturalistic* conception of God. Novalis leaves out the '*deus*' half of Spinoza's equation precisely because Spinoza's 'God' *is* the natural order, structured according to eternal, necessary laws.<sup>18</sup> Rather than identifying God with 'nature', Novalis seems, in other passages from the '*Fichte-Studien*', to identify God with a moral ideal. For example, in §54, he writes:

To worship God in spirit and in *truth* – theoretically infinite striving toward God – practical striving toward God – this *alone* [is] duration in general – in relation to this personal duration – this alone [is] unity in time – ideal morality, highest good. God creates us in his own image [cf. §119].

(II, 141; 38–9)

God, rather than being identified with the eternal substance of nature, instead becomes a kind of prototype or model for human moral striving. A similar move can be detected in §89, where Novalis deploys the Kantian-Fichtean concept of the 'moral God' as a kind of postulate or regulative ideal (II, 148; 46).<sup>19</sup> This impression is confirmed by §149, where Novalis asserts that 'The person [must rise] above nature to God' (II, 157; 54). Clearly, Spinoza's *deus sive natura* formula has been left behind in favour of

<sup>16</sup>All indications are that Schelling returned the favour, lampooning the more traditional religious sensibilities of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel in his 1799 'Epikurisch Glaubensbekenntnis Heinz Widerporstens'. See George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 55.

<sup>17</sup>Beiser maintains that the key to the Romantic reconciliation of Fichte and Spinoza lay in Herder's revised version of Spinozistic naturalism, which made possible a harmonization of the former's emphasis on freedom with the latter's monistic views. See *The Romantic Imperative*, 181–4. However, Novalis's strong reservations regarding monistic naturalism would seem to preclude any direct influence from Herder on his ultimate position.

<sup>18</sup>For clear summaries of Spinoza's particular conception of God, see R. J. Delahunty, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge, 1985) 125–30, and Alan Donagan, 'Spinoza's Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, edited by Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 343–82.

<sup>19</sup>On the tension between Novalis's own basic metaphysical and religious intuitions and this conception of the 'moral God', see Beiser, *German Idealism*, 417–18.

something approximating traditional theism. That this is the case is also shown by a look at §462, where Novalis seems to identify God with a moral prototype for humanity:

The universal of every moment remains, because it is in the whole. In every moment, in every appearance, the whole is operating. Humanity, the eternal, is ubiquitous – because it knows neither time nor space – we are, we live, we believe [*denken*] in God, because this is the personified genus . . . Can you say it is here, or there? It is all, it is *over all* [*überall*: everywhere]; in whom we live, breathe, have our being.

(II, 249; 147)

Elsewhere in the '*Fichte-Studien*', it is clear that Novalis is using the term 'humanity' in the same sense that it was used by Lessing and Herder (§667; II, 296; 194), that is, 'humanity' refers to the *ideal* of a human being, not its actuality. Therefore, §462 is best read as identifying, or at least associating, the concept of God with that of 'humanity' in this specifically *moral* sense.<sup>20</sup> Novalis's movement away from strict Spinozism and towards more orthodox Christianity is also evidenced by his sketchy attempts to derive the concept of the Trinity in §§159 and 167 (II, 159–60, 161; 57, 59). Other brief fragments from the '*Fichte-Studien*' also testify to his ongoing attempts to work through a more traditional form of religion (§§490, 493, 574; II, 257, 275; 155, 174). Thus, even at the earliest stages of his career, Novalis had significant reservations about Spinozism.

This close association between God and the ideal, moral order reappears in Novalis's first philosophical publication, the '*Vermischte Bemerkungen*' or '*Blüthenstaub*'.<sup>21</sup> In §33, he discusses how 'ideas' play a central role in motivation and in the formation of individual identity (II, 426). God is precisely this sort of 'idea', held in 'faith', and it is only through the latter that God is able to have any real effect on a person's motivation. Novalis is here envisioning a kind of *practical* faith; that is, on his account, belief in God functions as awareness of a moral order that impacts subjective motivation.

<sup>20</sup>This notion of a primal or archetypal human being has a long history in Platonic and Christian thought. See Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004) 131–4, 138–41, 143–4.

<sup>21</sup>Hans-Joachim Mähl maintains that it was actually *after* Novalis's mystical 'Sophien-Erlebnis', which occurred some time following the completion of the '*Fichte-Studien*', that Novalis adopted this more anti-naturalistic view of God. On Mähl's reading, this experience induced Novalis to develop a more metaphysically robust conception of this 'ideal world' than would have been warranted on his earlier, Kantian-Fichteian position. However, as the passages examined above from the '*Fichte-Studien*' show, Novalis was always reticent about Spinoza's naturalism and tended to identify God with a transcendent 'moral' or 'ideal' reality. See Hans-Joachim Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1965) 294–7.

This association is also notably present in the fragment collections from 1797 to 1798. ‘We will’, he writes, ‘understand the world when we understand ourselves, because both we and it are integral *halves*. We are children of God, divine germs [*Keime*]. Someday we will be what our Father is’ (II, 548). The idea that we could *become* God is scarcely intelligible on strict Spinozism, since God is all there is and God is eternal. But, on Novalis’s view, God is a kind of *moral prototype* for humanity. The traditional doctrine that human beings have been created in God’s image, to which Novalis makes repeated reference in the ‘*Fichte-Studien*’, is here interpreted through the lens of his own conception of the endless task of moral improvement. Thus, it comes as no surprise when Novalis registers his dissatisfaction with naturalistic moral theories that identify the mere enhancement of biological life with the highest good (§232; II, 576).

This profoundly non-Spinozistic, anti-naturalistic tendency in Novalis’s thought becomes even more explicit in the *Allgemeine Brouillon*. In §50, he asserts that ‘The *maker* [*Factor*] is opposed to *nature*. Spirit is the artist’ (III, 247). His mature position is even more pronounced in §60, a note on cosmology:

One must accordingly separate God and nature – God has nothing to do with nature – he is the goal of nature – that with which it ought to harmonise. Nature ought to become *moral*, and in this way Kant’s moral God and morality appear in a totally different light. The moral God is something much higher than the magical God.

(III, 250)

The rejection of the claim that nature has *any* goal, particularly one not identical with itself, is one of the more famous elements of Spinoza’s system. And yet, Novalis endorses precisely this very claim in §60 of *Allgemeine Brouillon*. Essentially the same move is made in §61: ‘Do I now want to put God or the world-soul in heaven? It would be better if I were to explain heaven as the *moral universe* – and allow the world-soul in the universe’ (III, 250). As in the ‘*Fichte-Studien*’ and the ‘*Logological Fragments*’, Novalis here conceives of God as an ideal moral prototype. In *Allgemeine Brouillon*, however, this conception is expanded to embrace not only human moral striving but the universe as a whole. Novalis’s God is a kind of ideal pattern to which all of reality must be progressively attuned.<sup>22</sup> This anti-naturalistic, moral conception of God can also be seen quite clearly when two later passages from *Allgemeine Brouillon* are juxtaposed with one another. First, in §79, Novalis writes that ‘God is *love*. Love is the highest reality – the primal ground’ (III, 254). In §885, however, Novalis suggests that the divine nature has yet to be fully realised: ‘The general, inner, harmonious

<sup>22</sup>In §590, he writes that God is the ‘sphere of virtue’ (III, 368).



connection [*Zusammenhang*] is not, but it *ought* to be' (III, 438). Applying what he had said about *nature* in §60 to *humanity* in §320, he proclaims that

The *theory of the future of humanity* contains everything that was predicted by God. Every machine, which now lives by the great *perpetuo mobile*, ought to itself become a *perpetuum mobile* – every human being who now lives from God and through God, should himself become God.<sup>23</sup>

(III, 297)

Beginning, then, as early as 1795, Novalis expressed reservations about thoroughgoing Spinozism. Even when 'Spinoza' or 'Spinozism' are not directly mentioned, it is clear from the survey of passages above that Novalis rejects the identification of God with nature. His views of God share more with traditional theism, and with the 'moral religion' of Kant and Fichte, than with Spinoza.

### 3. TOWARDS A NEW SYNTHESIS: HEMSTERHUIS AND PLOTINUS

Up until this point, we have observed two more-or-less competing tendencies in Novalis's thought. First, he certainly shares his generation's enthusiasm for all things Spinoza. Novalis finds Spinoza congenial to his own religious intuitions. In addition, he is interested in the possibilities latent in Spinoza's system for reconciling the dualisms of modern philosophy and for providing the longed-for 'first principle' for a philosophical system. At the same time, however, Novalis is clearly *not* in agreement with one of the cornerstones of Spinozism, i.e. the naturalistic conception of God. This divergence becomes clear even as early as the

<sup>23</sup>The ideal of 'becoming God' is found throughout Novalis's writings. O'Brien, in a recent study, takes this as evidence of Novalis's 'irreligion'. See William O'Brien, *Novalis: Signs of Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995) 220. This reading, however, is too strong. In the first instance, it ignores Novalis's emphasis on the role of *regulative* principles in moral life and in philosophy more generally. Second, it overlooks the Eastern Christian soteriology of 'divinization' or 'deification', traceable at least as far back as Irenaeus. See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and A. M. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). It is also useful to note that Lessing, the central figure in the 'Pantheism Controversy', was a serious Patristic scholar whose work on the ancient doctrine of deification had a significant impact on German Idealism. See, for example, the discussion in Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment: Lessing on Christianity and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For an example of Lessing's forays into Patristics, see 'Von der Art und Weise der Fortpflanzung und Ausbreitung der christlichen Religion', in *Werke: Vol. 5/1: 1760–6*, edited by Wilfried Barner (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1990) 426–46. There is no indication, however, that Novalis had any direct acquaintance with Lessing's works in this area. The classical source for the notion of deification is Plato. See Daniel C. Russell, 'Virtue as 'Likeness to God' in Plato and Seneca', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42 (2004) 241–60.

'*Fichte-Studien*' (1795). It resurfaces in Novalis's critical reaction to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in subsequent years. Novalis's anti-Spinozistic conception of God is fully articulated in the *Allgemeine Brouillon* (1798–9). Throughout this period, he also repeatedly affirms a conception of God as a moral prototype distinct from nature. Strict Spinozistic monism would preclude such a move. Novalis, however, champions an anti-Spinozistic metaphysics precisely in the name of this conception of God. These then, are the fundamentally opposed tendencies in Novalis's thought. This tension reflects the ambiguous legacy of the 'Pantheism Controversy' of the 1780s, the reverberations of which were still being felt in the 1790s. On the one hand, earnest, radical intellectuals embraced Spinoza and Spinozism as paradigms of Enlightenment and modernity. On the other hand, many of them felt themselves pulled in another direction by their own religious commitments and by their equal enthusiasm for Kantian and Fichtean 'transcendental philosophy'. Part of the genius of Novalis's thought lies precisely in the ambitious attempt to reconcile these opposing tendencies. The depth of his commitment to both is evident from the passages cited in the preceding two sections. However, before examining the fruits of his attempt at reconciliation, the crucial mediating steps need to be more fully understood.

Two figures who generally occupy the margins of philosophy came on the radar for Novalis in the winter of 1797–8: (a) the Dutch neoplatonist Frans Hemsterhuis,<sup>24</sup> and (b) the famous and influential neoplatonist Plotinus.<sup>25</sup> His reception of the work of these figures plays a crucial role in his attempts to reconcile Spinozism and theism. From the former, Novalis garnered the concept of the 'moral sense' or 'moral organ', which allowed him to construct an account of the way in which the ideal is mediated by the real. From the latter, Novalis inherited a conception of the divine as being *immanent* to the world but not *identical* with it.

The name of Hemsterhuis appears in Novalis's correspondence in a letter of 30 November 1797 to A. W. Schlegel (IV, 237).<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the most significant reference to Hemsterhuis, however, comes in a letter to Friedrich Schlegel of 20 July 1798. Here, Novalis relates his recent intellectual breakthrough, which he directly attributes to the influence of Hemsterhuis.

<sup>24</sup>The importance of Hemsterhuis for Novalis's emerging position with respect to the relation between God and the world has been noted by Christine Weder in 'Moral Interest and Religious Truth: On the Relationship between Morality and Religion in Novalis', *German Life and Letters* 54 (2001) No. 4: 291–309. This connection is noted on pp. 297–300.

<sup>25</sup>For an exhaustive and illuminating account of Novalis's reception of Plotinus, see Hans-Joachim Mähl, 'Novalis und Plotin', in *Jahrbuch des freien Deutschen Hochstifts*, edited by Detlev Lüders (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1963) 139–250. See also Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus und Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972) 87–93. Beierwaltes examines the reception of Plotinus by other pivotal figures in the philosophy of the 'Goethezeit', including Schelling, Hegel and Goethe himself (83–153).

<sup>26</sup>Another letter, also to A. W. Schlegel, from December 1797 also refers to the Dutch philosopher (IV, 239).

He writes: 'In my philosophy of daily life I have arrived at the idea of a *moral* (in Hemsterhuis's sense) astronomy and have made the interesting discovery of a religion of the visible universe' (IV, 261). This discovery, the 'religion of the visible universe', is Novalis's formulation of his synthesis of Spinozism and theism, and therefore of his own response to the legacy of the 'Pantheism Controversy'. The 'moral', in Hemsterhuis's sense, refers to the unobservable side of the universe, the archetypal patterns that unify the universe into a coherent whole and which are capable of being perceived via a 'moral organ'.<sup>27</sup> For Novalis, this concept allows him to conceive of how the ideal order can be perceived as *immanent* in the universe but not identical with it.<sup>28</sup>

Two other letters, from 1798 and 1799, respectively, give further clues about the sources and nature of Novalis's philosophical breakthrough. Writing again to Friedrich Schlegel, on 10 December 1798, he observes:

I do not know whether or not I have already written to you about my beloved *Plotinus*. I have gotten to know this man, who for me is a born philosopher, from Tiedemann – and was startled by his similarity with Kant and Fichte – and his *ideal* similarity with them. In my mind he is greater than both. Someone told me that my discovery is not new – this wonderful agreement is already noted in Maimon's *Life*. But why is everyone still silent about this? There is much that remains unused in Plotinus – and he is above all deserving of a new proclamation.

(IV, 269)

Here, Novalis associates Plotinus with his own *idealist* mentors, Kant and Fichte. Both Kant and Fichte resolutely opposed Spinozistic naturalism. For Fichte in particular, Spinoza was the epitome of 'dogmatism', the cardinal sin for a Kantian. Kant, in both the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, had made clear his own commitment to the existence of a noumenal domain not reducible to nature and so not subject to causal, mechanistic laws. Plotinus, too, assumes a fundamental duality between the 'sensible' and 'intelligible' realms; and yet the ultimate principle of the 'intelligible' realm, the 'One', also grounds the unity and coherence of the 'sensible' realm. The relation between this ultimate first principle and the remaining elements of Plotinus's metaphysical hierarchy is understood in terms of 'emanation'. As Novalis seems to have understood this idea, it contrasts sharply with the picture of divine causation held by many in the early modern period. Rather than acting on the world

<sup>27</sup>This account of 'moral' in Hemsterhuis is derived from Hans-Joachim Mähl's invaluable introduction to Novalis's '*Hemsterhuis-Studien*' (II, 314). For another account of Hemsterhuis's influence of Novalis, particularly on his moral-political philosophy and the concept of a 'golden age', see Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, 266–83.

<sup>28</sup>For a history of this conception of the ideal order as *immanent* in nature, see Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia perennis*, 209–11.

‘externally’, as it were, the divine ‘generates’ the world from itself. This is the ‘greater than’ which Novalis mentions in his comparison of Plotinus with Kant and Fichte. For Novalis, Plotinus provides insight into the *participation* of reality in an ideal order, and thus points the way towards a potential overcoming of the duality between the two so firmly held to by Kant and Fichte.<sup>29</sup>

In the second letter, this one written to Caroline Schlegel and dated 20 January 1799, Novalis mentions both Hemsterhuis and Plotinus ‘in the same breath’, as it were:

*Hemsterhuis* intimates this *holy* road to physics clearly enough. This divine spark of natural understanding also lives already in Spinoza. *Plotinus*, perhaps aroused by Plato, first entered the sanctuary with a genuine spirit – and yet none after him have penetrated so deeply into it. In many ancient writings there beats a mysterious pulse, which marks a point of contact with the invisible world – a quickening [*Lebendigwerden*]... If only one had already replaced *admiration* with another word in so-called physico-theology!

(IV, 276)

Novalis had begun his study of Hemsterhuis in 1797. As noted above, Hemsterhuis’s most significant contribution, at least as far as Novalis was concerned, is the concept of the ‘moral organ’. In his own comments on passages from Hemsterhuis’s works, Novalis is quick to draw a connection between this concept and religion, using the term ‘organ of faith’ as a kind of substitute (§27; II, 367). Likening this ‘organ’ to ‘binoculars’, Novalis notes Hemsterhuis’s claim that it enables the ‘discovery of the law of the universe [*Weltalls*]’ (II, 367). He goes on to observe how this ‘moral organ’ is a sort of inner divinity within human beings which allows them to perceive the universe *as* a beautiful whole, arranged by God:

God creates in no other way than we do – he puts things together. (*Aristee*, pt. II, p. 96). If creation is his *work*, then we also are his work – We can get to know creation, as his work, only to the extent that we ourselves are God – we do not *know* it insofar as we are *world* – knowledge increases – if we become more God.

(II, 378)

<sup>29</sup>Mähl offers a cogent reading of Novalis’s views of Plotinus as suggesting a new synthesis of Kantian idealism and realism. See ‘Novalis und Plotin’, 177–80. See also Beierwaltes, *Platonismus*, 88–90. Beierwaltes emphasises the role that Plotinus’s theory of emanation plays in Novalis’s attempts to formulate a new ‘physics’.

In the ‘Vermischte Bemerkungen’ (§23), Novalis publicly defends Hemsterhuis’s concept of the ‘moral organ’, clearly demonstrating his own enthusiasm for the idea:

The most arbitrary prejudice of them all is that the human being is denied the capacity to get outside himself and to have consciousness beyond the realm of the senses. At any moment, the human being can become a supersensible being. Without this capacity he would not be a cosmopolitan, but rather an animal... It is not [just] as seeing, hearing, or feeling; it is composed of all three, and is more than all three: a sensation of immediate certainty, a glimpse of my truest and deepest life.

(II, 420–2)

When this passage is juxtaposed with the gloss on Hemsterhuis quoted immediately prior to it, it becomes clear that Novalis is adopting Hemsterhuis’s idea as his own. The idea of ‘becoming God’, one of the more puzzling aspects of Novalis’s philosophy, receives some more definition in both of these passages. Novalis is not describing a possible apotheosis of human nature *per se*, but rather indicating the capacity of human beings to become conscious of and to participate in an *ideal order*. This implication of the doctrine of the ‘moral organ’ is revisited in a fragment from 1798 to 1799: ‘Humanity is, as it were, the higher sense of our planet, the eye that it raises toward heaven, the nerve that connects this member with the upper world’ (§186; II, 562). The complete formulation of this doctrine appears finally in §61 of *Allgemeine Brouillon*:

We must seek to become Magi in order to be able to be properly moral. The more moral, that much more harmonised *with God* – the more divine [*göttliche*] – that much more *bound* with God. God can only be perceived by us through the moral sense – the moral sense is the sense for *existence* without *external causation* – the sense for a *bond* – the sense for the highest – the sense for *harmony* – the sense for a freely chosen, invented, and yet *communal* life – and being – the sense for the thing in itself – the genuine *divinatory* sense.

(III, 250)<sup>30</sup>

Here, Novalis combines the doctrine of the ‘moral organ’ with his conception of God as ideal prototype. The use of the ‘moral organ’ is likened to the secret arts of the ‘Magi’, primarily known as astrologers. Just as astrologers try to perceive the decrees of fate or the divine will through the patterns of celestial bodies, so Novalis’s moral ‘Magi’ attempt to attune themselves to the *ideal moral order* that is identified with the divine. This involves having a sense for *harmony*, i.e. for the coherence and order of the

<sup>30</sup>Other passages from *Allgemeine Brouillon* that mention the ‘moral sense’ or ‘moral organ’ include §197 (III, 275) and §552 (III, 361–2).

world as it reflects an ideal order. The ideal order is, as it were, perceived *within* the real. Novalis presents the programme thus in §789, ‘Intuition [*Ansicht*] of the whole world through the *moral sense* – deduction of the universe from the *moral*’ (III, 424).

It is important to recognise that Novalis’s theory of the ‘moral organ’ does not entail the claim that God is a *construct* or a *postulate*.<sup>31</sup> To the contrary, he uses the language of ‘revelation’ to describe the insights that this ‘organ’ or ‘sense’ makes possible (§23; II, 420–2). He calls the ‘moral organ’ a ‘capacity for revelation’ and a type of ‘sensibility’ (*ibid.*). Both of these descriptions indicate that the ‘moral order’, which Novalis identifies with God, is an objective reality that human beings are capable of learning to appreciate. When he comes to talk famously of ‘romanticizing’ the world in the ‘Logological Fragments’, he is careful to note that this operation of the moral organ is one in which a person ‘re-discovers the original sense’ of the universe (§105; II, 545). This *realist* inclination reappears again in §125 of the ‘Logological Fragments’, where Novalis writes that ‘My *spiritual* efficacy – my realization of ideas – cannot be a *decomposition* and re-creation of the world, rather it can only be an *operation of variation*’ (II, 554).

Combining ideas gleaned from Hemsterhuis and from Plotinus, Novalis reconceives the relationship between the ideal and the real. He rejects equally the monistic naturalism of Spinoza, the remote God of deism, and the irreconcilable dualism between the moral and the real in Kant and Fichte. Instead, he maintains that the ideal order, while never *identical* with the real, pervades the real as a kind of ‘bond’ or ‘harmony’ that enables the universe to exist as a coherent whole. This does not mean, however, that the divine realm is identified with a ‘world-soul’. Nor does Novalis consider the world to be a ‘fixed quantity’, necessarily determined by immutable divine laws. He makes it clear that, on his view, the world ‘is not completely and *totally* determined – and is still determinable in many other ways to any end...’ (§125; II, 554). The world is not a ‘complete, rational being’ (II, 554). The upshot of this is that the ideal order, or God, is not yet fully realised in the world. The relationship between ideal and real is not like that between an animating principle and the body that it animates. Rather, the relationship is more like that which obtains between a plan and an actual building. The plan, in this instance standing for the ideal world, is a kind of archetype or pattern. When built according to the plan, the building, or the visible universe, evidences a kind of order or coherence. This, in turn, allows for a mediated awareness of the original plan as instantiated by the building. Similarly, the coherence and order of the world, when viewed through the ‘moral organ’, expresses or points to the divine order on which it rests.

<sup>31</sup> *Pace* Beierwaltes, who maintains that the ideal order, intuited within nature, is somehow or other an imaginative construction of the poet-philosopher. See *Platonismus*, 90.

## 4. THE 'RELIGION OF THE VISIBLE UNIVERSE'

Novalis's own characteristic response to the legacy of the 'Pantheism Controversy' is best understood as an attempt to reconcile Spinozism, broadly conceived, with a more idealistic or anti-naturalistic conception of the divine, through the agency of Hemsterhuis's concept of the 'moral organ'. Novalis himself provides a variety of different designations for this response. The most well-known, and perhaps the least understood, is 'magical idealism'.<sup>32</sup> At the time of his breakthrough to this synthesis, however, the phrase 'magical idealism' is nowhere in evidence. In his letter to Friedrich Schlegel of 20 July 1798, quoted previously, Novalis refers to a 'moral (in Hemsterhuis's sense) astronomy' and a 'religion of the visible universe' (IV, 261). The latter formulation recurs in the 'Teplitz Fragments' from 1798 (II, 619). In the *Allgemeine Brouillon*, he outlines a 'practical physics' or a 'moralizing of nature' (III, 247), a 'spiritual physics' (III, 311), 'pantheism' (III, 314), and a 'syncretism' that blends realism and idealism (III, 333; cf. §694, III 401). Again in 'Christentheit oder Europa' (1799), he alludes to what he calls a 'living astronomy' (III, 522).

In the last collection of fragments, written shortly before he succumbed to tuberculosis, Novalis summarises his view thusly (§611): 'The true philosophy is throughout a realistic idealism – or *Spinozism*. It rests upon a *higher faith*. Faith is inseparable from idealism' (III, 671). Recall that, in the 1796 letter to Schlegel quoted in the first section, Novalis makes it clear that his initial interest in Spinoza is driven by the latter's apparent congeniality to Novalis's own religious intuitions. In the passage quoted above, the 'true philosophy', by which Novalis undoubtedly means his own burgeoning system, is also closely linked with *faith*. The 'true philosophy' is, in fact, the systematic articulation of Novalis's own religious views which, as this passage also suggests, have grown out of his encounter with Spinozism and with the 'Pantheism Controversy'.

All of the passages quoted above are ways of formulating the fruits of Novalis's attempts to steer a path between Spinoza's naturalism and mechanism and the dualism of both traditional Christianity and of Kant's and Fichte's 'transcendental philosophy'. This new position, the 'religion of the universe', is best understood as a species of *panentheism*. God, identified by Novalis with the ideal, archetypal moral order, is the *goal* of the universe as a whole and of human life in particular. He uses terms such as 'love', 'harmony' and 'humanity' to intimate the content of this ideal. As with Kant and Fichte, God becomes a object of moral striving. At the same time,

<sup>32</sup>The classic account of Novalis's 'magical idealism' is Manfred Frank, 'Die Philosophie des sogenannten 'magischen Idealismus'', *Euphorion* 63 (1969) 88–116. For a more recent account, which emphasises Novalis's continuing debts to Fichte, see Johannes Ullmaier and Stephan Grätzel, 'Der magische Transzendentalismus von Novalis', *Kant-Studien*, 89 (1998), No. 1: 59–67.

following his encounter with Hemsterhuis, Novalis maintains that this ‘moral God’ is not simply a ‘postulate’ of reason, but instead can be perceived *within* the real. The universe, for Novalis, is never a completed whole, bound together by necessary laws (as in Spinoza’s system). Instead, it maintains a degree of *indeterminacy*, though it is certainly ordered and shaped by the ideal norms that Novalis identifies with ‘heaven’ and ‘God’.

Novalis presents the core of his new position in ‘*Vermischte Bemerkungen*’ (or ‘*Blüthenstaub*’), in §73. In this passage, he frames his own characteristic view as an attempt to reconcile pantheism and traditional Christian theism. In so doing, Novalis is signaling that his view is meant as a response to the fractious legacy of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’. He begins by observing that ‘Nothing is more indispensable to true religiosity than a mediator [*Mittelglied*] that binds us to the divinity. In no respect can a human being stand in an immediate relation to it’ (II, 442). The centrality of a ‘mediator’ later occupies an important place in Schleiermacher’s account of religion in his *Über Religion* of 1799. Novalis, however, was the first to yoke this concept so tightly to religion. Novalis’s view is that the ‘divine’ ideal order is never directly perceptible, but instead appears to human beings in and through some third agency. Hemsterhuis’ influence can be detected here as well. In a gloss from 1797 on Hemsterhuis’ writings, Novalis observes that ‘Hemsterhuis thinks that one must be satisfied with the external, symptomatic knowledge of the structure of the universe’ (II, 377–8); that is, while Hemsterhuis certainly maintained that human beings have a capacity to perceive the hidden ‘moral universe’, he also held that this perception is necessarily mediated by the ‘visible universe’ of nature. So central is this concept of a ‘mediator’ that Novalis is willing to call ‘irreligion’ any system of beliefs that dispenses with the idea (II, 442). ‘It is’, he writes, ‘true religion that accepts a mediator as a mediator – as it were taking it to be the organ of divinity – *for its sensible appearance*’ (II, 442, emphasis added). A mediator, then, is a kind of *sensible sign* of the divine, or, to borrow the term he uses in his ‘*Hemsterhuis-Studien*’, it is a ‘symptom’ of the underlying ideal order of the universe. ‘Religion’, for Novalis, just *is* the perception of the divine via a mediator.

However, as Novalis notes, religion is by no means free of conflict. Instead, it is precisely regarding *the central religious concept*, that of a mediator, that conflict arises. He writes:

Upon closer inspection, however, the true religion appears to be divided into an antimony – into pantheism and entheism [*Entheismus*]. I here take the liberty of taking pantheism not in the common sense – rather, I understand under it the idea that everything can be an organ of divinity or a mediator insofar as I elevate it to that point. Entheism, on the other hand, designates the belief that there is only one such organ in the world for us, that it alone is



adequate to the idea of a mediator, through which alone God allows himself to be perceived – without it entheism would not be true religion.

(II, 444)

The conflict between ‘pantheism’ and ‘entheism’ (or, we might say, ‘monotheism’) is precisely the conflict that emerged during the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ of the 1780s. In order for this to be a conflict about *religion*, Novalis maintains that the point of disagreement must turn on the concept of *mediation*. Pantheism, he suggests, is the view that everything can potentially be a mediator of the divine, while entheism, on the other hand, holds that there is only one such mediator. It should be clear enough that Novalis’s paradigm of ‘entheism’ is Christianity, which, particularly in its Protestant form, emphasises the soteriological sufficiency of Christ alone as the incarnate Logos. The ‘pantheism’ that Novalis has in mind is clearly not strict Spinozism, but rather the kind of ‘neo-Spinozism’ that was shared by figures like Lessing, Herder, and Schleiermacher, and which conformed quite closely with his own basic religious intuitions. Novalis continues:

As incompatible as both of these appear to be, their unification can still be contrived – if one makes the entheistic mediator into the mediator of the mediating world of pantheism – and, as it were, centers the latter through the former – so that both are, though in different ways, necessary to each other . . . Every object can be a temple for the religious person, in the sense of the Augurs. The spirit of this temple is the omnipresent high priest – the entheistic mediator – who alone stands in an immediate relation to the Father of All.

(II, 444)

Here, Novalis clearly announces his intention to unite the seemingly incompatible religious systems of ‘pantheism’ and ‘entheism’. Again, the key to this reconciliation lies in the concept of a *mediator*, which was also the source of the divergence of these two systems. The ‘entheistic’ mediator is the mediator *par excellence*, who ‘stands in an immediate relation to the Father of All’. This latter assertion, of course, echoes many of the discourses of Jesus in John’s Gospel. The Fourth Gospel is also famous for its Prologue, in which the author recounts eternal origins of the divine Word and its subsequent incarnation. Novalis’s suggestion, then, seems to be that the pantheistic impulse to find the divine in everything is compatible with the entheistic emphasis on the sufficiency of a single mediator so long as the latter is conceived along the lines of the Johannine ‘Logos’ or ‘Word’, through which the world was created; that is, the entheistic mediator embodies the pattern or moral order that is the ultimate goal of both cosmic and human history. The entheistic mediator thus ‘centres’ the mediating ability of the universe as a whole. Insofar as any object can be a sign or

‘symptom’ of the invisible ‘moral universe’, it must also somehow encode the embodiment of this ‘moral universe’ itself.

This ambitious attempt to resolve the conflicts of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’ remains central to Novalis’s system long after §73 of ‘*Vermischte Bemerkungen*’ was composed. Indeed, in ‘*Christentheit oder Europa*’, written in 1799 after the publication of Schleiermacher’s *Reden*, Novalis revisits this attempt to bridge the gap between pantheism and theism:

Christianity has three forms. One is the creative element in religion, the joy in all religion. Another is mediation in general, the belief in the capacity of everything earthly to be the wine and bread of eternal life. Yet a third is the belief in Christ, his mother and the saints. Choose whichever you like. Choose all three. It is indifferent: you are then Christians, members of a single eternal, ineffably happy community.

(III, 523)

The capacious conception of ‘Christianity’ articulated here is entirely of a piece with Novalis’s earlier attempts to resolve the conflicting legacy of the ‘Pantheism Controversy’. On his view, vague religiosity, ‘pantheism’, and orthodox Christianity are all valid expressions of the fundamental concept of religion, i.e. of the mediation of the ideal by the real. In the years intervening between ‘*Vermischte Bemerkungen*’ and ‘*Christentheit oder Europa*’ (1797–9), Novalis has had occasion to work out the details of his synthesis with more precision; but the basic view expressed in ‘*Vermischte Bemerkungen*’, and labelled ‘the religion of the visible universe’ in the 1798 letter to Schlegel, remains a constant.

In one of the ‘Logological Fragments’ from 1798 (§104), Novalis expresses his basic position by contrasting it with the mechanistic view of nature: ‘Formerly, everything was an appearance of spirit. Now we see nothing but dead repetition that we do not understand. The meaning of hieroglyphs is missing. We still live on the fruits of better ages’ (II, 545).

Here, Novalis likens the universe to a series of ‘hieroglyphs’, mysterious symbols whose meaning, in 1798, had not yet been deciphered by modern scholars. Indeed, ‘hieroglyph’ is a fitting term for what Novalis elsewhere calls a ‘mediator’. Literally, ‘hieroglyph’ means ‘sacred or holy carving’. To those ignorant of the often mundane significance of ancient Egyptian writings, it seemed that these symbols harboured a mysterious, almost mystical power.<sup>33</sup> Novalis is picking up on this general fascination with the

<sup>33</sup>A good example of the way in which ignorance of the meaning of hieroglyphs led to complex theoretical developments is Friedrich Creuzer’s *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker*, published in four volumes between 1810–12. For an illuminating account of Creuzer’s work and the academic disputes that it occasioned, see George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, 127–45.

mysteries of antiquity, and using it as a trope for his own conception of the 'religion of the universe'. This idea recurs in §30 of the 'Teplitz Fragments', where Novalis asserts that 'The world is a *universal growth* [*Universalstropus*] of spirit – a symbolic picture of it' (II, 600). In supplements to this collection of fragments, Novalis sings the praises of Johannes Kepler who, despite his undeniable successes in astronomy, did not share the crude mechanism of later physicists and philosophers:

I return to you, noble Kepler, whose higher sense created for itself a spiritual [*vergeistigtes*], moral universe, instead of that which is held to be wisdom in our age – killing everything, degrading the high instead of elevating the low – and even submitting the spirit of humanity to the laws of mechanism.

(II, 619)

Novalis's basic position is also present in many parts of the *Allgemeine Brouillon*. Echoing his interest in Plotinus's theory of emanation, and §30 of the 'Teplitz Fragments', in §70 Novalis ascribes the origins of the universe to a process of 'spiritual *secretion*' (III, 252). In line with his earlier use of 'hieroglyphs' as a metaphor for mediation, he notes in §143 that 'Not only the human being speaks – the universe also *speaks* – everything speaks – infinite languages. Theory of signs' (III, 267–8).<sup>34</sup> The ideal of religiosity expressed at the end of §73 of '*Vermischte Bemerkungen*' reappears here in §257, where he describes how 'There are fortunate people who perceive God everywhere – who find God everywhere – these people are genuinely [*eigentlich*] *religious*' (III, 286). Similarly, in §901 he states that 'Every *accident* [*Zufall*] is miraculous – influence of a higher being – a problem *datum* for the active religious *sense*' (III, 441). That is, every event presents an opportunity for the exercise of the 'moral' or 'religious' organ.

In his last writings (1799–1800), cut short by his worsening health, Novalis continues to develop his basic system. Here, Novalis redefines religion as *love*, itself understood as the emulation of the divine, ideal, archetypal love that comprises the essential core of reality. He presents this ideal religion in §48, capturing some of the most enduring aspects of the Christian patrimony. 'Love', he writes, 'is free – it chooses the poorest and those most in need of help as the most beloved. Therefore God receives the poor and sinners as most beloved' (III, 562). He goes so far as to identify 'religion' with this divine love: 'Where there is a loveless nature, there is also an irreligious nature'. The '[r]eligious task [*Aufgabe*]' is '*to have sympathy* [*Mitleid*] with the *Godhead* – infinite melancholy of religion' (III, 562).

<sup>34</sup>This aspect of Novalis's characteristic position finds a precedent in the work of J. G. Hamann (1730–88). See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*: 20. Beiser relates how Hamann's views were anchored in a mystical vision or conversion experience. His summary of Hamann's position sounds like it could have been written by Novalis: 'If all natural events are divine symbols, then the supernatural will not transcend the natural but be embodied in it. All true physics will be religion, and all true religion will be physics' (21).

Novalis's religious ideal is one of patterning one's life after the ideal divine nature, a view which is clearly a departure from strict Spinozism and which comes much closer to both traditional Christian piety and Kant's 'moral religion' of the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Religion in the Limits of Mere Reason*.

A new element in Novalis's thoughts on religion in this, the last stage of his career, is the claim that *humanity* is a kind of privileged mediator of the divine. In '*Vermischte Bemerkungen*' and in other places Novalis indicates his own inclination toward what he calls 'pantheism', i.e. the view that everything can and ought to become a mediator of the divine, ideal world for human beings. While he does not abandon this view in his later writings, he does seem to devote particular attention to the idea that *humanity* is particularly well suited to play this mediating role. This move probably reflects the growing importance of both Lessing and Schleiermacher for Novalis. In §609, Novalis makes explicit reference to Lessing's great work, *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, and indicates his plan, at the time, to develop Lessing's ideas further (III, 669–70). Like Lessing, Novalis maintains that true 'morality' is identical with authentic 'fear of God', i.e. the disinterested choice of the morally good (§664; III, 684). Lessing's thesis in *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* is stated quite clearly at the outset of the piece: 'What education is to the individual human being, revelation is to the whole human race.'<sup>35</sup> Lessing's claim is that human reason develops through responding to divine revelations, with the ultimate goal being and ideal of 'humanity'. Schleiermacher, on the other hand, argues that the history of humanity is a privileged point for the intuition of the 'universe' that forms the essence of religion. 'To join the different moments of humanity to one another and, from its succession, to divine the spirit in which the whole is directed' is, according to Schleiermacher, 'religion's highest concern'.<sup>36</sup>

Under the influence of both Lessing and Schleiermacher, Novalis comes to share their views about 'humanity' as an ideal, and about human history as the privileged manifestation of the divine.<sup>37</sup> He first makes this claim in §70, where he asserts that 'One must seek *God* amongst human beings. The spirit of heaven is most brightly manifested in human events, human thoughts, and human feelings' (III, 565). For Novalis, this positions extends even to the point of venerating the physical form of human beings as manifestations of an ideal order: 'There is only one temple in the world, and that is the human body. Nothing is more holy than this lofty form. Bowing to human beings is paying tribute to this revelation in the flesh' (§75; III,

<sup>35</sup>Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, translated by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 218.

<sup>36</sup>Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, translated by Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 41.

<sup>37</sup>This point is also noted by Haering in *Novalis als Philosoph* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954) 338–9.

565). In §80 he calls this the '[r]eligiosity of physiognomy' (III, 566). To put it as simply as possible, Novalis's view at this stage is that 'God can appear to me in every human being' (§604; III, 666).

Novalis has by no means abandoned the 'pantheism' that he had describe in '*Vermischte Bemerkungen*' and to which he had pledged allegiance in his correspondence with Schlegel. Instead, he has simply refined his conception of *mediation* and thereby arrived at the view that human nature, human society, and human history are privileged mediators of the divine. In §84, he makes it quite clear that this new position is by no means meant to exclude his earlier 'pantheism': 'As one can make everything into an object of an epigram or an idea [*Einfall*], so one can change everything into an *oracle* [*Spruch*], a religious epigram, a *word of God*' (III, 566). Novalis clearly rejects orthodox Lutheran biblicism, with its staunch insistence on the *sola scriptura* principle. This does not imply, however, that he rejects the Bible or the Incarnation out of hand.<sup>38</sup> Instead, he envisioned a 'gospel of the future' that would not so much *replace* Christianity as *further its cause*. Indeed, he indicates that this 'gospel of the future' grows out of 'Luther's notion of the atonement and of the merit of Christ' (§9; III, 557). Novalis finds his version of 'pantheism' entirely compatible with the traditional Christian belief in the Incarnation, as he indicates in §603: 'If God could become a human being, he could also become a stone, a plant, an animal, and an element, and perhaps there is in this way an enduring redemption of nature' (III, 664).

Indeed, this is precisely the most compelling and ambitious aspect of Novalis's project of a 'religion of the visible universe', namely, that it is an attempt to reconcile the rich heritage of Christianity with modernity. For Novalis, the 'religion of the visible universe' is not anti-Christian, but instead is the next stage in the historical process that was initiated by Christianity. In §11 of a collection of fragments composed between June and December 1799, Novalis alludes to a '[r]eligion of the *unknown* God of Athens' (III, 557). Just as Paul, in his speech on the Areopagus, appeals to the Athenians' liberal worship of an 'unknown God' in order to point them towards the new disclosure of the divine in the person and work of Christ, so Novalis suggests that the process of revelation and of concomitant religious reformation is still ongoing. This broad, historical perspective on Christianity pervades Novalis's last writings, and he clearly views his own project, and that of other Romantics such as Friedrich Schlegel and Schleiermacher, as a matter of helping Christianity to progress to a new level of refinement. In §84, he suggests that this entails the exploration of the untapped potential of the Christian legacy rather than wholesale rejection of it in favour of some 'new' religion: 'The New Testament is for us still a book with seven seals' (III, 567). 'Who', he writes in §97, 'has taken the Bible to be

<sup>38</sup>Pace O'Brien, who argues that Novalis's rejection of biblicism and on the exclusivity of the Incarnation as a revelation of God is tantamount to *irreligion*. See *Novalis: Signs of Revolution*, 218–20.

closed or finished? Should the Bible not still be thought of as growing?' (III, 569). His project is not one of writing a new Bible congenial to his and his contemporaries' liberal, Romantic sensibilities, but of carrying the revolutionary potential inherent in Christianity to a new level. 'No event', he observes, 'in the history of religion is more noteworthy than the new idea in emergent Christianity of a *humanity* and a *universal religion* . . .' (§193; III, 579).

Novalis's ultimate recommendation, then, is not an enlightened rejection of Christianity, but a radicalization and deepening of its true potential through a synthesis with the 'Spinozism' that so many in the 1790s found compelling. He expresses this programme in §604:

On the possible mythology (free fable [*Fabelthum*]) of Christianity, and its transformation on the earth. God, as doctor, as one who inspires [*Geistlicher*], as woman, friend, etc. Everything good in the world is the immediate effect of God. God can appear to me in every human being. In Christianity one must study eternity – it becomes something ever higher, more diverse and wonderful.

(III, 666)

Rather than enlightened unbelief, Novalis recommends a '[u]niversal presentation of Christianity', i.e. a synthesis of Christianity with 'pantheism'. This synthesis is precisely what Novalis names the 'religion of the visible universe', and it is his own characteristic attempt to work out the legacy of the 'Pantheism Controversy'.

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