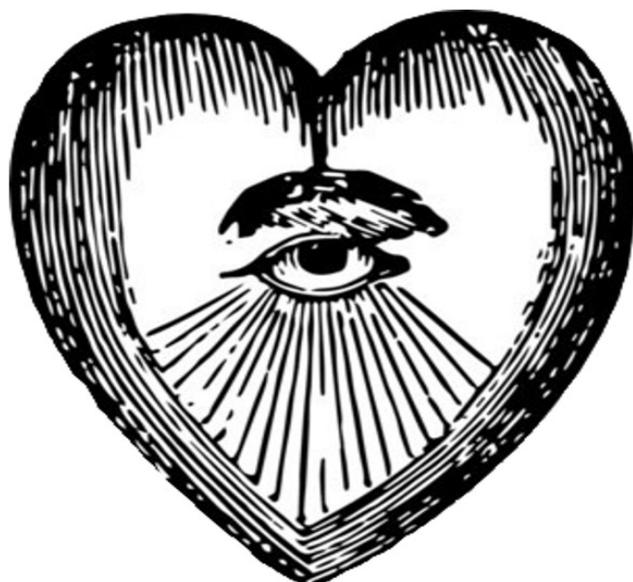


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Novalis and Magical Idealism

By: Jack Hardacre

Oh Sun, thou must vanish
 Yon yon hillock beneath;
 A shadow will bring thee
 Thy cooling wreath.
 Oh draw at my heart, love,
 Draw till I'm gone,
 That, fallen asleep, I
 Still may love on.
 I feel the flow of
 Death's youth-giving flood;
 To balsam and Aether, it
 Changes my blood!
 I live all the daytime
 In faith and in might:
 And in holy rapture
 I die every night

Thus echo the words of the arch-romantic Novalis, a man who articulated a vision of a world unbound from the shackles of logic and measure which hold us so tightly. A man who reached into the womb of revelation and pulled out the primordial force which animates us, not one of reason, but one of creative imagination. Who sought not to constrain the forces of the mind within a web of formulaic limit but to grasp a fraction of the original power of the irrational realm. To decry the “despotism of the earthly” and to exalt the night, the force which separates our creative spirit from our body, breaking the bonds of the light, reuniting with the beloved. Novalis offers an alternative path toward renunciation of the earthly, one which instead of going through the Platonic gauntlet, reaches directly into the incorporeal and channels the Night, the principle of creation, into transmutation.

Plato and Kant

Novalis presents a philosophy which has come to be known as “Magical Idealism”. Idealism meaning that ideas and metaphysical structures take precedence over material reality in one way or another. Novalis’ Idealism is a direct outgrowth of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism which he studied in his late teen years, which constituted its own revolutionary addition to

Platonic Idealism; to understand Novalis we must understand both Platonic and Kantian thought. Platonic Idealism posits that material existence, and our empirical senses are not truth, instead they are distortions of a higher, perfect reality, the Realm of Forms. Platonic thought holds that reality is nothing but waves of emanation from a single unitary being known as “The One”, from this being we move down the ladder and as we get further and further away from the divine light of The One, as the emanation is stretched thinner and thinner, we lose this being’s unitary clarity. At the bottom of this hierarchy of existence is the body and existence in the Realm of Genesis where you and I find ourselves. In this lower realm our bodies cannot interact with the Forms as they really are but only their imitations. If we are able to purify our souls though, and separate that divine spark from the material body, then we can once again commune with the Forms.

Kant breaks with Plato and denies the independent reality of the Forms, instead insisting that the “forms” are “within our mind” so to speak. We gain knowledge not through communion with and contemplation of incorporeal Forms, but through sense perception, the exact thing which Plato said impeded knowledge. Kant in fact posits that, far from the incorporeal being the well of truth, it is actually completely unknowable to us. We cannot ever know something outside ourselves as it really exists (Noumenon), but only through our subjective senses (Phenomenon). Transcendental Idealism holds that the Noumenal world is unknowable to us because we do not have the mechanism to objectively process things in and of themselves, we can only perceive reality as mediated through our senses and our mind. While Kant does reject the Forms specifically he does not fully reject the existence of beings beyond humanity, nor does he really reject the existence of a “spiritual dimension”; he simply says that these things belong to the world of Noumenon, and being inaccessible through our senses, can never be known to exist or not. He puts a sort of quarantine on the supramundane world and posits we cannot authentically access it since, while we can interact with the physical world through sense perception, we cannot do so with the supraphysical.

Novalis’ Revolution

Both Kant and Plato, in their own way, impose a separation on us from the Mundus Imaginalis, the manifold modes of existence above and below our own. Plato does so by requiring us to separate completely from the body and purify the soul in order to interact with the supramundane, while Kant tells us that to do so is simply impossible. Novalis shatters this illusion outright, he asserts that the gap between the Phenomenal and Noumenal worlds, while real, is bridged through the power of the creative imagination, through love, and through what Novalis calls the Night. The Night reaches through the barrier, reaches out to us from the annals of prehistory, from the incorporeal wilderness outside of our material realm. It reaches out and our soul reaches back, our soul thrashes and fights to break the chains of rationality, it reaches out in desperation to be reunited with the Night, with the beloved. I will quote a bit here from Novalis’ fifth Hymn to the Night.

“The earth was boundless, the abode of the gods and their home. From eternal ages stood its mysterious structure. Beyond the red hills of the morning, in the sacred bosom of the sea, dwelt the sun, the all-enkindling, live luminary.”

In ancient times, in prehistory, Novalis describes a world where the fruit was sweeter, the weather better, the gods visible in all facets of our lives. The idea of a prehistorical Golden Age like this is common throughout many religious dispositions, whether it is the Garden of Eden, the Hindu Satya Yuga, or the Greek Golden Age. Novalis conceives of this time as a time where divinity and spirituality were united with the material world, and where love, the force of irrational creativity was dominant; “a god was in the grape-clusters; a loving, motherly goddess upgrew in the full golden sheaves; love's sacred carousal was a sweet worship of the fairest of the goddesses.” It was a world where the sun's light was both a representation of and physical vehicle of love. Where its rays shone down and transmitted the creative irrationality of the soul from the gods to man.

“The old world began to decline. The pleasure-garden of the young race withered away; up into opener, regions and desolate, forsaking his childhood, struggled the growing man. The gods vanished with their retinue. Nature stood alone and lifeless. Dry Number and rigid Measure bound her with iron chains. As into dust and air the priceless blossoms of life fell away in words obscure. Gone was wonder-working Faith, and its all-transforming, all-uniting angel-comrade, the Imagination. A cold north wind blew unkindly over the torpid plain, and the wonderland first froze, then evaporated into Āther.”

This old world, this world of spirit decayed and eventually was overthrown. What was once a world imbued with creative force, where the gods lived among us, was replaced with a world where these things are bound with chains of number and rationality. Where the gods have vanished and our souls, our imagination, has become isolated from its brothers in spirit. It is the end of the golden age and the move into the world we inhabit today. Novalis' point is that we do not live in a natural state of affairs, the plane we inhabit is one of artificially imposed desacralization and demystification, a sterile world in which we can no longer be in the presence of the gods nor interact with the supramundane.

“No longer was the Light the abode of the gods, and the heavenly token of their presence: they cast over them the veil of the Night. The Night became the mighty womb of revelations; into it the gods went back, and fell asleep, to go abroad in new and more glorious shapes over the transfigured world.”

The gods retreated into the Night, leaving the world of man behind to bide their time until men would wake up and throw off the shackles of rationality. Until the day when our hearts could once again reach into the Night and through the force of creative love reintegrate that feeling into ourselves. This is what Novalis, and the Romantics in general wanted to convey; through the irrational force described variably as love, the imagination, creativity, the Night, or the beloved, we can reconnect with the primordial world of the gods and shed the Phenomenal binding which holds us.

To Plato, Novalis retorts that by no means must we be isolated from the Mundus Imaginalis, by no means must we study the systems of logic which brought us to this point in the first place; instead we must reject these things entirely and through the creative imagination we can feel the embrace of the Night. To Kant, Novalis rejects outright the barrier between us and the supramundane, Noumenal world; within us we hold forces beyond logic, beyond reason, which allow us to interact with entities outside ourselves and outside our plane of existence. The separation that has been imposed upon us is not permanent, nor is it necessary; to break the barrier between subject and object is as simple as allowing the Night into yourself, allowing your soul to commune once again with the slumbering forms of the gods. To express the force of the Night through poetry, through art, and through philosophy as it should be, imbued with the irrational spirit of the Night. Novalis seeks to saturate philosophy with the creative imagination, with this fire of the beloved.

Magical Idealism seeks the same thing as the Alchemical Hermeticists, to convert decay into rebirthing flame, to renew the world and break entropic decay, to turn the wheel. While the Alchemists seek to do this through the completion of the Magnum Opus (the Alchemist's journey toward physical and spiritual transmutation), Novalis seeks to do so by reenchanting humanity through poetry and art using irrational modes of expression to shake people out of their mathematical stupor. It's important to note that these are ultimately the same thing, the law of the Hermeticists states;

“As above, so below, as within, so without, as the universe, so the soul”.

The completion of the Great Work on the level of matter, the transmutation of lead into gold, represents also the completion of the Opus in the realm of man, of soul, of the gods, etc. What is done on one plane is mirrored up and down the ladder. Thus, Novalis's project to remind mankind of the Night within themselves is simultaneously reaching toward the same transmutation of matter, of Spirit, of reality, that the Hermeticists sought.

The very basic procedure of the Alchemical work is split into three stages, the Nigredo, the Albedo, and the Rubedo; the darkening, the lightening, and the reddening, the process is mirrored in Magical Idealism.

The Nigredo is the dissolution of all things, their decomposition into an undifferentiated black mass, an acceleration of decay to its logical endpoint. While the Alchemists would achieve Nigredo by boiling their lead into a black sludge (accompanied of course with their own spiritual

Nigredo), Novalis does this with the Night, the irrational force which annihilates barriers. The breaking down of differentiation between the Phenomenon and Noumenon, the rational and irrational, between the supramundane and the Earthly, the Golden Age and the Iron Age. The Night boils away differentiation until the soul is lost in the stormy torrent of her womb. Only then has the soul been able to break away from the bonds of differentiated rationality, only then is it primed to embrace the project of renewal.

Next is the Albedo, the lightening; achieved by the Alchemists through the dissolving of the ashes and sludge of the Nigredo in order to reconstitute a coherent form, a material now rid of impurities. To Novalis the Albedo is the reawakening of the Imagination, not as the word is commonly used, but as the soul's ability to take part in irrational creativity. The Imagination is the ability of the soul to illuminate itself as well as to cast its creative light on the world around it. Where the Nigredo dissolves the barrier between Phenomenon and Noumenon by reducing them to a single mass, the Albedo redifferentiates the two but now allows communication and interaction between them. The Imagination is just this, the ability of the soul to coherently interact with that which is outside itself, through the Albedo the soul is able to violate Kant's principal axiom and commune with the supramundane, as was (according to Novalis) done in prehistory. Where we were once trapped within ourselves, trapped in the Phenomenal world, the Imagination allows us to reach out and speak with Noumenal existence. The Imagination flies where it pleases and has rapport with whom it wants, Kant be damned. It is akin to the unbound, winged souls in Platonism who, freed from their bodily prisons, are able to interact with the Forms. This reawakening of the Imagination is made possible only by the initial Nigredo, the breaking of barriers in order to rebuild, the engine of creation lying in destruction.

Finally is the Rubedo, the reddening, the integration of opposites, the dialectical synthesis; this was symbolically achieved by the "Chemical Wedding", the combination of previously purified materials. Often this was done by adding purified quicksilver to the purified lead, but it could take many forms. What it represented was the resolution of division not through dissolution like in the Nigredo, but through unification in a way only made possible by the Albedo's enlightening of the previously opposite substances. This is also the final stage of Novalis' Great Work. The integration of opposites through the final reunification of the soul with the beloved. The unity of Phenomenon and Noumenon, the material and the incorporeal, the subject and the object. This is Novalis' goal, to conduct a great alchemical transformation on the people, with poetry and art as the vehicle for it. To reenchant the world and to reintegrate the gods, the supramundane into ourselves. To complete the project of philosophy not through dry measure and logic, but through irrational love.

With his Magnum Opus complete, Novalis has broken the barrier Kant set before us. He says; "you cannot cordon us off from the Mundus Imaginalis and that which is beyond our understanding, you cannot "solve" irrational forces which fundamentally cannot be logically unravelled, you cannot simply refuse to engage with the incorporeal." Magical Idealism gives us the vehicle with which to act upon that which is ordinarily beyond ourselves and instead of attempting to brute force a solution through reason, to seek communion with the supramundane

directly and to express this through art. Furthermore, it recharacterizes philosophy as what it ultimately is, art, and in doing so illuminates the path.

Plato's Place in the Golden Chain:

Platonic Philosophy as Mystery Initiation

By: Jack Hardacre

In the vulgar, materialistic manner that so often characterizes our modern world, the initiatory rite that is Platonic philosophy has been desacralized, turned into a mess of word games and “logical proofs”. This is contradictory to Plato’s intentions, as well as the content of the texts both in the esoteric and exoteric sense. It separates the Platonic corpus from its context and attempts to fit it into modernity. Platonism is not the birth of modern logic, nor the inception of analytical philosophy, but a link in a long chain of initiatic mystery traditions which continues to this day. Plato is more akin to historical semi-divine prophets than to the popular image of a “philosopher”. The most direct corollaries to the historical Platonists are not the Kantians nor the Rationalists, but mystery schools like the Orphics and the Pythagoreans, two other cults which initiated those deemed worthy of learning their esoteric teachings.

The first thing to understand about Platonism is that, just like Greek religion itself, it was layered. There was exoteric Platonism, just as there was exoteric Pythagoreanism and Homeric myth, but there was also a deeper, esoteric layer which only a select group were initiated into the understanding of. The surface level Plato is pondering questions of morality and city planning, while the esoteric Plato is at the same time using such moral questions to transmit higher messages about the nature of reality and the soul. With The Iliad and Hesiod’s Theogony as well, you could choose to interpret these as straightforward myths, Achilles does this, Zeus does this, Cronus does this; or, you could look beyond the veil (in the ancient world you would be physically initiated into this knowledge) and come to understand what Cronus represents, what metaphysical message Homer is really trying to transmit. It is important to also keep in mind that this was not an accident, Homer was not an unclear writer or anything like that. The layered nature of these myths, of Platonism itself was intentional, his writings (and those of his successors) allow lessons on morality and right living to be transmitted to the many while simultaneously transmitting a higher order truth to those with eyes to see it. The fundamental law of the Hermeticists is “As above, so below.” This means that everything is mirrored both upward and downward, everything that exists here also exists in an order above and an order below. This is how I like to think of Homer, Orphism, Platonism, even Christianity and other major religions; there is the lower order truth and there is the higher order truth. Neither is necessarily more correct than the other, they are simply the same message mirrored on two levels.

To understand Platonism we must understand the traditions which it was building upon, the first of which is Orphism. The Orphic Mysteries had two central myths which we see reflected in both Pythagorean and Platonic thought. They are the myth of the origin of the Universe and the murder of Dionysus. These two myths together establish the central truth which welds together all links on the golden chain. In Orphism the universe is born from a single point, that being the Cosmic Egg, a single entity which births the god Phanes. Phanes then constructs

the universe, imbuing it with light and its first principles. The symbolic meaning obviously being that the entire universe proceeds out from a single uniformity, from the Cosmic Egg, which births the creator. Phanes takes the role of the architect while not being the ultimate point of origin, he is born out of that point of origin, and is the expression of that point of origin, but he is not it. This differs from the Christian origin myth where God is both the architect as well as the point of origin. This allows the actual creator to remain a unitary, undifferentiated entity.

This myth is mirrored in Pythagorean thought with the Monad. The Monad is analogous to the cosmic egg but is described with more mathematical language. The Monad is the single uniform entity from which, again, the rest of the universe proceeds. From the Monad in turn comes the Dyad of limit, the entity which emanates from the infinite One and constructs the ordered universe. Thinking about it, the Monad, as a principle of complete simplicity and uniformity, could not create a universe which is full of complexity and differentiation. In order to generate something complex you need to have division. This division is not possible with a perfectly uniform entity. Thus, the generation of the Dyad from the Monad which imposes limit. If you are familiar with Plato then you see where this is going, he refers to the same exact concept, this time under the name “The One” and describes how from this supremely simple, supremely uniform entity the rest of the universe proceeds. The Zeusian principle, as well as the entity of Zeus, or Apollo, or whoever you want the creator of the universe to be, proceeds from the One, and acts to differentiate and order the universe. It is also worth noting that this myth continued on with the Gnostic Christians. Sethian Gnostics referred to this idea as “The Great invisible Spirit” and the first procession from this infinite being as the Barbelo, or “First Thought”. Arguably we continue to adhere to this principle today with the idea of the Big Bang out of one point of origin.

So we understand that the universe emerges from a single uniform entity, and we understand how this entity births limit, and limit constructs the universe. Now, if this was all there is then we would have a perfectly uniform, perfectly ordered universe. But, this is not reality, so where does the opposing principle come from? If we believe that everything proceeds from a being of ultimate order and uniformity, where does Chaos come from? In Orphism this is explained using the myth of the Murder of Dionysus/Orpheus. In this myth Orpheus, being the son of Apollo, is the personification of the principle of order and unity in the universe. Orpheus is ripped apart and murdered by the Maenads, fanatical followers of Dionysus. Thus, the personification of order is ripped apart in a chaotic frenzy. This sets up the opposition between Apollonian order and Dionysian chaos. This opposition is now the basis for conflict in the formerly ordered universe and sets up the rest of Orphic thought. Interestingly in some myths Orpheus is swapped out for Dionysus as the principle of order and the Titans for the principle of Chaos. Thus you get the Dionysian vs. Titanic instead of the Apollonian vs. Dionysian.

Pythagorean thought echoes this opposition with the Monad vs. the Dyad. The Dyad is an entity with two parts, a part which imposes orderly limit, and a part which embodies infinite unbound chaos. They name these opposing principles Pera (limit) and Apeiron (the unlimited). Pera takes the role of the murdered Orpheus/Dionysus and Apeiron the role of Dionysus/the Titans. They are simply the same principles described in a more mathematical, less mythical

manner. In Platonic thought this same idea is again echoed but is elaborated on, especially by the Neoplatonists. We end up with a Platonic system which is fundamentally identical to the esoteric interpretation of the Orphic myths. This cosmology, of a supreme struggle between order and chaos, likely came to the Greeks through the Egyptian priesthood (though it undoubtedly precedes them as well). The myth of Osiris' murder at the hands of Set is surely the inspiration for the myth of Dionysus' murder.

If you understand the religious nature of Platonism, this line from Plato's *Phaedo* becomes more significant;

“They do not reflect that no bird sings when it is hungry or cold or suffers in any other way, neither the nightingale nor the swallow nor the hoopoe, though they do say that these sing laments when in pain. Nor do the swans, but I believe that as they belong to Apollo, they are prophetic, have knowledge of the future and sing of the blessings of the underworld, sing and rejoice on that day beyond what they did before. As I believe myself to be a fellow servant with the swans and dedicated to the same god, and have received from my master a gift of prophecy not inferior to their, I am no more despondent than they on leaving life.”

With the understanding that Apollo serves as the personification of the principle of order, this passage goes from a quip on Socrates' levity toward death, to an admission that he is acting as a conduit for the same Apollonian truth that Orpheus did. Pythagoras as well conceived of himself as being a servant of Apollo. The Pythagoreans believed that he could go to and from Hades at will, just as Orpheus, the son of Apollo, famously did. We come to understand that Plato was more of a divine theoprotos, rather than a pondering philosopher. However, the truth is that this modern distinction which we impose on figures like Plato is not historically accurate. Far from being two divided and opposed groups, the divinely possessed prophet and the calculating, pondering philosopher were one and the same. It was understood that philosophical thought was a method of communing with and being closer to the divine. To the Orphics, the Pythagoreans, and especially the Platonists, philosophical contemplation was a form of worship. To excise this essential part of Platonism and conceive of it the way we do today is just ridiculous.

We understand that Platonism shares its roots with the Orphics and the Pythagoreans, but beyond this it shares the same view of human existence. In Orphism the Titans who murder the avatar of divine order (Dionysus) are subsequently smote down by Zeus' divine lightning. It is said that from the piles of ash which Zeus reduced the Titans to, the first humans arose. Therefore humans contain both the titanic, chaotic, and corporeal material of the ash, as well as the incorporeal, ordered, divine spark of Zeus' lightning. This Zeusian vs Titanic division manifests in humans with the division between the material body and the soul. The body being the corrupting agent which shackles the incorporeal and divine soul to our present existence on Earth which is called the “Realm of Genesis” or “Realm of Poseidon”. It is the belief of Platonists that our souls do not originate from the plane of existence we currently inhabit but were brought down here by way of the imprisoning body. This idea is of course echoed in Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and countless heterodox Christian sects from the Sethians to the Cathars. This extends to all matter, not just the body, to Platonists all material existence is simply a crude mockery of the perfect incorporeal realms above. Thus you have now applied the fundamental Zeusian/Titanic split to humans.

Thus, the activities of man too can be divided into those in line with the incorporeal and those aligned with the material, with the soul and with the body. In The Phaedo Plato says “The body is the source of endless trouble to us by reason of the mere requirement of food; and is liable also to diseases which overtake and impede us in the search after true being. It fills us full of loves, and lusts, and fears, and fancies of all kinds, and endless foolery, and in fact, as people say, takes away from us the power of thinking at all.” To the disciples of Plato the body and its desires are really nothing but an impediment to the actual purpose of existence, philosophical contemplation and worship of the gods. Platonists see the default disposition of a human being as the superior soul being enslaved to the inferior material body. The goal of Platonic practice is to gradually separate the soul from the body so that upon the death of the body the soul is released and allowed to move to a higher realm instead of being continually shackled to the body. I would like to write a whole article on Platonic metempsychosis so I will be brief here but Platonism believes that even upon the death of the physical body if the soul has not been “purified” during somebody’s life it will simply be reborn in a new body and the cycle will continue. While not identical, there are many similarities to Buddhism in that the soul must be cleansed during life in order to escape the eternal return.

This is where the Platonic Academy comes from, far from being a university in the modern sense where you go, take some classes, and leave; the Academy was a place not to listen to some lectures, but to center your whole life around purification of the soul. You would spend your days practicing asceticism, engaging in sacred philosophical contemplation, and in later incarnations of the academy, engaging in theurgic rites (ritual magic). This set up was the same as that of the Pythagoreans who gathered and practiced an ascetic life of mathematical and philosophical contemplation. While we do not necessarily know if the Orphics had similar communities like this, they did live their lives according to the same ascetic, purificatory creed. We see a clear and obvious continuity from Orphism, the unquestionably religious school, to Platonism, the supposedly enlightened, purely reason driven movement. Of course, like I said before, this is a false dichotomy as to Plato’s students, logic, reason, and philosophical contemplation were divine, and ways to connect with the divine. There was no separation between their philosophy and their religiosity.

Now, pointing this stuff out is not exposing some big secret, Plato talks about all this openly in his dialogues. What I do think is important, and what I want to get at with this article, is that the modern conception of Plato, and really of Western philosophy as a whole, cuts out an essential part which leaves it feeling very sterile and fails to get across the original point of “philosophy”. The mystical and the philosophical are inextricably linked, to separate them negates the entire point of philosophy and stunts intellectual growth.

I would be remiss to not mention the work of Algis Uždavinys who has written extensively on the topic of Platonism’s esoteric dimension. He is in my opinion the greatest Platonist of the 20th/21st century, and if you are interested in that topic you should read his works *“Orpheus and the Roots of Platonism”* and *“The Heart of Plotinus”* especially.

The Preface to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: Sections 1 - 72

By: Jack Hardacre

The Dialectic

Thus goes Spirit, tumbling through the womb of revelation, clawing past the crags toward the marble facade of Olympus. Desperately adjusting and readapting as eternal, unceasing movement transmutes both itself and that which is outside itself. Desperately scrambling for purchase as it is battered by the waves of change, forever moving upward in its eternal journey. Spirit wanders and pleads ; “How do I go on?” “Where do I go from here?” “How can I escape the endless motion?” But there is no rest for Spirit, its lot is to ceaselessly move and to ceaselessly develop, for though it may not realize, the alternative is death. True death, not the endless creation and destruction which it already engages in, the negation of its own essence in order to rebuild anew. No, if Spirit were to stop and rest it would die in an altogether different way, it would dull, become stagnant, and eventually cease its motion altogether. Only then would Spirit truly be dead.

In reading Hegel the most important concept to understand is the dialectic, though it has become a bit of a buzzword and something thrown around without real understanding, it is fairly simple. All it does is describe the process of movement within things. Whether that is consciousness, electricity, magnetism, gravity, it does not matter, the dialectic describes the movement and the process of evolution which takes place within it. It could be seen as a description of the process of entropic reversal, the revival of that which has grown dull, or, to put it more in theme for this journal; the dialectic is simply the Alchemical Magnum Opus as it is applied to particular things. Just as the dialectic is a description of natural processes, so too is the Opus which can be applied to particulars which follow that fundamental process. The Phenomenology of Spirit is the charting of Spirit’s journey upward through the motion of the dialectic, through the successive reiterations of the Magnum Opus, and into its next form. The Opus, as well as its “stages” are just names for phenomena which replicate across time, across space, and across dimensionality. When Hegel refers to the Understanding or Absolute Spirit, he is not referring to something different than the Hermeticists were when they called it the Nigredo or Rubedo; he is describing the same phenomenon with different words and in a different context.

The actual mechanics of dialectical movement are also fairly simple, it is often broken down into three parts, “Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis”; the original proposition, the contradictory proposition, and finally their resolution and the synthesis of a new proposition containing both

the previous ones. If we look into the deeper mechanics of dialectical movement though, we can map out a more descriptive process, one which bears undeniable similarity to the *Magnum Opus*. I believe that this is Hegel's goal in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, I believe he is trying to familiarize readers with the components of the Alchemical working and with their analogues in his own dialectical process. Though it is a bit of a contrived insight, the Preface really does act as an initiation into the frame of mind required to parse beyond the surface of the *Phenomenology* and of Hegel's project as a whole. To see Hegel's work for what it really is, a fundamentally Hermetic and esoteric perspective is required.

Though both Novalis and Plato contain all stages of the *Magnum Opus* within themselves, their thought can also function as a discrete part within a wider project. All things can ultimately function as both self contained processes and also be integrated into larger workings. Novalis' Night representing the *Nigredo*, the dissolution of the principle, Plato's thought representing the *Albedo*, the lightening of the substance and its reconstitution, and Hegel's project being the *Rubedo*, the synthesis of the two and their incorporation into a more complete and evolved version of the path. Not to repudiate or nullify any of his antecedents, but to transmute seemingly opposing statements of reality into a novel, higher form. Hegel represents, to me, nothing short of the most developed and modern explication of the path of spiritual ascent that we have today, he is a modern *Hermes Trismegistus*, restating the eternal truths and advancing them forward. Engaging in that same dialectical movement in order to contribute toward the development of *Weltgeist*.

It is also important to understand that you as a conscious individual have the dialectical process ongoing within yourself. However, your individual dialectical movement is also a part of a wider dialectical movement which all of humanity engages in in order to advance both our individual and collective consciousness. This collective consciousness is known as the *Weltgeist* or World Spirit. As *Weltgeist* develops, the "default" consciousness of any individual is also raised as society implants this advancing *Weltgeist* into children through education.

Science and The *Nigredo*

"It is this coming-to-be of Science as such or of knowledge, that is described in this
Phenomenology of Spirit"

-Section 27 of the Phenomenology of Spirit - G.W.F Hegel

Hegel's stated goal with the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to chart the journey of Spirit (the collective consciousness of humanity) from its origins in sense-certainty, to Science. But the Science which Hegel sees as the next step for Spirit is not identical, nor really that similar to the "science" which we recognize today. Instead of the clinical and sterilized "science" which the word brings to mind for us, Hegel's Science is instead the creative, generative mirror of the ancient transmuting processes. He describes Science as the "bringing of fixed thoughts into

fluidity”, the rending of what exists in order to be reconstituted through Spirit. That which was once motionless and sterile must be dissolved and refashioned through the active Spirit, it goes from a fixed object to a self moving, spiritual and dialectical relationship. It does not even really have to be said but this obviously is the same exact process as that of Alchemical transmutation, the Nigredo dissolves, the Albedo relightens, and the Rubedo synthesizes. Just as the Hermeticists were simply restating eternal truths for the new age, so does Hegel; the only difference is that instead of using Chrysopoeia as a physical mirror for the spiritual ascent, Hegel bypasses the physical dimension and seeks to describe the Opus specifically on the mental/spiritual plane.

“The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the Understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power.”

-Section 32 of the Phenomenology of Spirit - G.W.F Hegel

“But first thou must tear off from thee the cloak which thou dost wear – the web of ignorance, the ground of bad, corruption's chain, the carapace of darkness, the living death, sensation's corpse, the tomb thou carriest with thee, the robber in thy house, who through the things he loveth, hateth thee, and through the things he hateth, bears thee malice.”

-The Greatest Ill Among Men is the Ignorance of God - Hermes Trismegistus

For the Nigredo Hegel posits the Understanding or the Verstand. The Understanding is the faculty of thought which dissects a concept and isolates its parts. It is the function of consciousness which dissolves that which we take in through our senses and allows us to parse the constituent components of an idea; a function which is essential to the fixed concept's development into a moving thought. Upon taking something into your mind it enters as an unmoving and fixed thing, the first step toward converting that to a fluid dialectical movement is dissolution by the Understanding. This is in contrast to the Romantic view of writers like Novalis who seek to dissolve fixed thought through art and the power of the Night's creativity, in fact Hegel directly criticizes the Romantic writers for seeing the Absolute as something which can never be known except through art; Hegel believes that through the power of the Understanding even the Absolute can be understood and dissolved. On the other hand, Hegel does acknowledge the impulse of the Romantics as correct, he says that Spirit has become “impoverished” and obsessed with the sensuous, it is only with heroic effort that Spirit can be convinced to turn its nose up and look to the stars. While critical outwardly of the Romantic effort, he ultimately agrees with their central thesis, he just seeks to re-enchant the world through philosophical Science instead of through poetry. Hegel believes, much like the ancient Platonists, that the path toward Absolute Knowing is through reason, that despite the corruption, materialization and perversion of that noble power, it is still the way forward as opposed to Romantic anti-logical reaction.

“Besides, it is not difficult to see that ours is a birth-time and a period of transition to a new era. Spirit has broken with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined, and is of a mind to submerge it in the past, and in the labour of its own transformation.”

-Section 11 of the Phenomenology of Spirit - G.W.F. Hegel

Hegel sees himself as standing on the cusp of a new world, he sees the winds of change blowing and seeks to guide the burgeoning currents which have come to define modernity. He sees these changes coming and with the Phenomenology is attempting to guide them in the right direction, in alignment with the eternal laws, in alignment with the Hermeticists and their spiritual ancestors before them. Ultimately, despite his criticism of the more extreme parts of the spiritual movement which the Romantics represent, he is very much a part of that same milieu; he just sees Novalis and Schlegel as going about the Opus incorrectly. If Hegel saw the state of modern “science” and the culture around it he would be disappointed and would feel that his vision has not yet been fulfilled, we still stand only at the threshold of an actually Scientific (in the Hegelian sense) conception of reality. We have sharpened the Verstand to a razor’s edge, we are able to break down and dissect everything which exists and we have become extremely good at holding these fixed thoughts in place for inspection. However, we have ossified here, we got stuck at the first part of a three part process. We marvel at the Crow’s ability to dissolve all that exists to the point that we have forgotten this is only the beginning of the process. We have forgotten the actual purpose behind this dissolution. We allow Saturn’s influence to overtake and instead of utilizing his power for a greater work, we have allowed him to hold us in place himself. This is to be expected though, the development of Weltgeist is an ongoing process which unfolds over dozens, hundreds, if not thousands of generations successively building upon each other. What good is the dissolution of a concept if you do nothing to rebuild and transmute your now dissolved material? We can tear down and dissolve to our heart’s content but all this yields is immobile blocks of detritus; there is no movement forward until we accept that it takes the moon’s presence to induce actual reconstitution and conversion into dynamic fluidity.

Subject and The Albedo

”[Thereon] out of the Light... a Holy Word (Logos) descended on that Nature. And upwards to the height from the Moist Nature leaped forth pure Fire; light was it, swift and active too.”

-Poemandres, The Shepherd of Men - Hermes Trismegistus

Thus, in order to break out of the Saturnine age of static materiality we find ourselves in, the shocking fire of the Swan is required. Hegel describes this process as "Substance becoming Subject." Substance is the product of the Understanding and of the Nigredo, it is the solid objects

left over from the breakdown which occurred during the initial contact of a foreign concept with consciousness. Once the Understanding grabs hold of a thing and dissolves it, it does not want to let go, it would like nothing more than to hang onto its spoils and keep them as disconnected, immobilized, and ultimately useless images. Through our own error, and through the dominance of the Understanding in our thought, we have reduced all things to this state, not just in the world of “science”, but our culture, our relationships, and especially our spirituality. Through our perfectly sharpened Verstand we have reduced even the Absolute, God himself (not in a Christian sense but as the term is understood in philosophy) to a static and impotent object, to substance. This is essentially what Nietzsche is trying to say in Thus Spoke Zarathustra; he too recognized that God has been reduced to a meaningless form, unable to move nor change. When everything is dissected to this level it all becomes the same, even God becomes part of the uniform sludge which characterizes our day to day experience, an existence without distinction and without variety.

“But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks
 from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but
 rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins
 its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It
 is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes
 to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing
 or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass
 on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only
 by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This
 tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts
 it into being. This Power is identical with what we earlier called
 the Subject, which by giving determinateness an existence in
 its own element supersedes abstract immediacy, i.e. the immediacy
 which barely is, and thus is authentic substance: that being or
 immediacy whose mediation is not outside of it but
 which is this mediation itself.”

-Section 32 of the Phenomenology of Spirit - G.W.F Hegel

The conversion from Substance to Subject occurs when these dissected images wake up and regain the ability to be self moving, when they are able to turn toward themselves and thus recognize their being as one which too contains dialectical movement. Substance is only able to undergo this radical shift after the Understanding has forced it to confront itself through its dissolution; Substance is forced to enter into a dialectical movement with itself, facilitated through the Verstand. The shocking realization which both Subject and Spirit undergo at this point, the revelation which constitutes the Albedo, is that the process of alchemical/dialectical movement is ongoing and active within all things at all times. Within every cell, every proton,

every star, every idea, every god, there is constant movement; the wheel never stops turning and within everything is contained the entirety of existence as conceived of through the dialectical process. This is what the Albedo is, the re-lightening of that which has become detritus, and the enlightenment that this revelation forces Spirit to undergo.

The actual moment of Substance becoming Subject occurs when Spirit conceives of the separation of itself from the objects it observes as a natural function of the superiority of Spirit over Substance. This misses that the separation is actually a defect of both the Substance and of Spirit itself. It is this defect which becomes the negative which both Substance and Spirit engage with in order for Substance to become Subject and for Spirit to move past the Understanding. Both parties engage in dialectical combat with themselves and develop through it; this is the negation of the self by the self. Subject is now able to move of its own accord instead of only being acted upon by other forces.

Upon Substance's emergence Spirit is shocked, instead of the inanimate object which it has been observing, now a self moving being containing the same processes which consciousness believed were exclusive to itself is there staring back. It would be as if you were looking at a tree, observing its bark, performing tests on it, cataloging it, when suddenly it opens its eyes and stares back at you with a gaze containing the same light as your own. Thus, Spirit is confronted with the truth that the supposedly inanimate nature around it also has self movement. The distinction between subject and object has begun to break down, the line between observer and observed, between self and other has started to crack. When Substance wakes up the only response for consciousness is to rise to the occasion and reorient itself to the reality that it resides on a plane of existence populated with infinite other self moving dialectical motions.

Let's take a step back and think about this process in more emotional terms. The Nigredo, the dissolution brought by the Understanding is a clinical act. It is not passionate, it is the "scientific" dissection which does not regard the object being dissected as a self moving entity. The revelation that these objects which we have been tearing apart are in fact moving Subjects is a horrifying thing, to come to understand that everything around you is engaging in the same processes as you, to understand that what you have been so callously ripping apart is in fact no less "conscious" than you is disarming. If we accept that all things are engaging in dialectical movement we then must come to understand that these dialectical processes which we initially believed to be self contained, are in fact able to branch out and engage with other dialectical movements. When we brought these concepts into our mind we did so under the impression that we, as the superior self moving organism, would assimilate this Substance into ourselves and expand our knowledge. Instead, we now realize that we are engaging with another moving entity which is no doubt engaging with us in the exact same way. We are not simply consuming this thing, it is engaging back with us and using our dialectical movement in order to improve its own. Engaging with things becomes not a process of consumption but one of mutual development for both parties involved. This reintroduces emotion into the process, it is in a lot of ways the same result which Novalis and the Romantics sought, only achieved through reason instead of art. It is a shift away from clinical, cold measure toward an active, emotional

conception of reality. This paradigm shift in our conception of reality turns Spirit into an enlightened mover, journeying around engaging with other movers in order to develop both itself and that which it touches. This change in outlook is essential for Spirit's advance towards the next "level", in this case Hegel's Science. It is necessary to come to this outlook in order to see the path toward the Rubedo.

It is worth keeping in mind that this process has happened before. Hegel's conception of history is the development of the Weltgeist through successive iterations of dialectical/alchemical movement in order to achieve the next stage of development. A lot of the character of Platonic thought can be better understood as the Albedo stage of the spiritual revolution which Greece and the Mediterranean underwent. Before Plato, the Pre-Socratic philosophers had a distinctly critical and dissecting character which sought to pick apart established norms and render them absurd. This is what pre-socratics like Anaximander did, he tore apart reality and reduced it to its constituent parts, breaking down matter into the four elements (water, air, fire, and earth) and critically examining the nature of the divine. Democritus and his Atomism can be thought of as the peak of the Ancient Greek Nigredo, the dissection of reality into its most basic pieces of matter, atoms, is precisely what the Understanding does. In fact, as soon as Democritus achieved his goal and apprehended the atomic nature of matter around 400 BC, the Subject turned inward and recognized itself as Subject triggering the Platonic revolution. Plato apprehended this shift from the Nigredo stage to the Albedo and put it into words. His works are rife with lightening imagery, in fact in the *Apology* he likens himself to a Swan, the very bird which represents the Albedo. Plato's conception of God as the One, a being of infinite goodness whose light emanates down from the heavens and animates all of reality is as much of an Albedo conception of the Absolute as you can possibly get. The Platonic raising of knowledge and reason above all else, the call to dedicate your life to philosophy, the Realm of Forms, it is all very much representative of the alchemical quicksilver which purifies the ashes left from the Nigredo. Even the aesthetics we associate with Platonism, the marble statues, are expressions of an albedo Weltgeist. Plato's mission was that of Spirit which has experienced the revelation of Substance becoming Subject and which reorients itself toward engaging with incorporeal ideas, as well as nature, in this spirit of benevolence and genuine knowledge seeking. In any event, my point here is that far from a one time occurrence, the process we find ourselves in has been repeated across time and across space back into infinity, eventually a modern Plato will come and we will enter in kind the Albedo stage of our own cycle, in pursuit of Hegel's Science.

Begriff

Begriff, usually translated in Hegel as Notion, is the sustained activity of dialectical movement. If the confrontation of I with I is the spark which triggers the shift from Substance to Subject, Begriff is the fire which keeps this process going and allows the Subject to move forward. To put it simply; Begriff is the engine which powers the entire alchemical/dialectical process. The newly awakened Subject relies on Begriff to reach out and grasp that which is

outside itself and instead of dissecting it like Verstand, Notion seeks to have dialogue with, struggle against, and ultimately merge with the antithesis and produce something new which contains elements of both previously opposing dialectical movements. This goes of course not just for the subjects we observe but for Spirit itself, we too have been changed by the revelation of the Albedo and so we now rely on Begriff to interact with outside Subjects instead of Understanding like we did before. Without Begriff pushing Spirit to engage with that which is outside itself, we would fall into navel gazing self satisfaction at our newfound enlightenment. When Begriff has been sufficiently lit through the initial negation of self by self, we have now moved into a fully realized system where, once again, Spirit recognizes that all things contain dialectical movement within themselves, where things are constantly turning their inner wheel as well as contributing to the working of other entities both above, below, and equal to themselves.

On the topic of the Spirit's graduation to the use of Begriff, Hegel issues a warning for Spirit which has become newly awakened. In section 50 of the Phenomenology Hegel says: "Of course, the triadic form must not be regarded as scientific when it is reduced to a lifeless schema, a mere shadow, and when scientific organization is degraded into a table of terms." This is something which I hope to avoid in my own writing. It can be easy to glom onto things like the alchemical process and the dialectic, then use these words to shallowly describe everything that you see. This is done very often and it fundamentally misses the point. You do not use concepts like the Albedo, Begriff, dialectical movement, etc. to merely describe something already established. They are not adjectives but the fundamental nouns which constitute the movement of existence. They are more akin to how we think of gravity or magnetism (although even these principles have the dialectical process beneath them) in that they are laws of the universe and everything else is built on top of them. They are the foundation instead of an artifice added on the facade. The alchemical process is contained within all things and as a fundamental principle of reality it applies to specific things not from the top down but from the bottom up. This is the revelation which springs Spirit from the Albedo toward the reddening, just as the revelation of Substance becoming Subject did before.

The Rubedo and Macrocosm

"Think that thou art at the same time in every place in earth,
in sea, in sky; not yet begotten, in the womb, young, old, [and] dead,
in after-death conditions. And if thou knowest all these things at once times,
places, doings, qualities, and quantities; thou canst know God."

-Mind Unto Hermes - Hermes Trismegistus

Finally we come to the end, the Rubedo, the Chymical Wedding, the reddening, the synthesis, the unification of opposites, the Peacock's tail, the grasping of the rose. This is the final aim of Alchemical practice, the realization of the Magnum Opus, and for Hegel, the state of

Absolute Knowing. Spirit has lost itself in the Nigredo, it has reconstituted itself in the Albedo, and upon the revelation of the triadic nature of the fundamental forces of reality it is ready to engage in the synthesis of the Rubedo. Spirit has already recognized the dialectical nature of Subject in the previous revelation; after this it spends a great deal of time exploring and engaging with other dialectical beings in order to sharpen and develop itself. However, in this process it is still treating these things it interacts with as outside of itself, it recognizes the universe as, like in Platonism, emanations of God or the One, or the Monad; connected through their origin but distinct as they exist now. The revelation which triggers the Rubedo is that these distinct entities are not emanations down from the creator imbued with dialectical movement, but instead sprouts growing up from the soil of Alchemical process. The dialectical movement of both Spirit as well as the Subjects it interacts with is a byproduct of the dialectical movement of the fundamental soil from which our own workings have sprouted. That soil too is engaged in Alchemical movement and is likely also a byproduct of an even larger Magnum Opus being carried out within some higher, unknowable entity. This in turn would be the result of the same, on and on up into infinity. This also means that our own dialectical movement, both in Weltgeist as well as individually, is producing its own dialectical byproducts which take on lives of their own too. Could a single skin cell within our body be engaging in its own dialectical working? Could the protons which make up this cell be doing the same? I would say that following the logic of Hegel the answer is yes. In the past it was believed atoms were the fundamental units of reality, then it became protons, neutrons, and electrons, now it is quarks. There is no reason such a thing should stop there, and if we subscribe to either Hegel or the Hermeticists before him it goes on down into infinity. The revelation which spurs Spirit to the Chemical Wedding is that our dialectical movement is but one part of an infinite interconnected network of dialectical interactions which is constantly moving and forever ongoing. The unification of Subject and Object which was the mission of Novalis and the Romantics has finally been achieved through reason and dialectical movement.

This fundamental interconnectedness of dialectics also means that in some way, all connected dialectics are in fact one movement. This is Absolute Knowing; to grasp this oneness of interconnected forms. Spirit is able to look out into reality and see infinite mirror images of itself looking back. It is when Spirit recognizes this that it finally is able to fully integrate with its opposite and become something new, something which contains elements of both itself and the other. It is upon realizing this truth that, like a child, it is reborn on a higher level than the “parents” from which it came, while still carrying its predecessors within itself. In many ways we have once again dissolved the myriad Subjects into a single entity. The difference though is that unlike in the Nigredo where things are dissolved into inert substance, we now are connecting and synthesizing in a manner which preserves the fluid motion of the dialectical process. While the Understanding brings things down into a mass of impotent uniformity, Rubedo or Absolute Knowing raises them up into an interconnected, singular dialectical movement. It is the recognition that all of reality is a self developing process which Spirit is a part of.

This is fundamentally different from the Albedo which sees the divine as a single uniform entity from which all else flows, but it does not see God as a self moving process himself. Aristotle's concept of the unmoving mover epitomizes this; he conceives of the divine as a motionless actor who sets all else in motion but remains undisturbed in the heavens. The revelation of Absolute Knowing conceives of all reality as a web of interconnected movements and this web itself is the divine. To Hegel God is also engaged in constant movement and goes through the stages of the Alchemical process himself.

At this point it is tempting to think of the state of Absolute Knowing, and the achievement of Science as an end goal or final state of affairs. This view fundamentally misses the entire point of Hegel though, neither Science nor Absolute Knowing are final goals nor the end all be all of Spirit's journey, they are only stops on the eternal road. Remember that if the dialectical/alchemical process can be likened to an ever spinning wheel, and if reality is fundamentally a dialectical working, then we can conclude that there is no actual "end state" in which perfection will be achieved; instead there is a constant and unceasing striving upward into the infinite. Once Weltgeist achieves Science as Hegel describes, this will eventually become its new baseline. Eventually that Science will become obsolete and another revolution in consciousness will be required. Just as the ancients did, and just as Hegel seeks to do. The nature of fundamental reality must be re-apprehended over and over forever; while the fundamental triadic forces themselves never change, they must continuously be recontextualized and rediscovered for each particular instance in time, in space, and for different Subjects.

"The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world."

-Section 11 of the Phenomenology of Spirit - G.W.F. Hegel

Conclusion

To all who read through this whole journal I would like to thank you, I hope that the articles were of interest and hopefully they will compel you to write your own. If you are already a writer or if you have the inclination to be part of future volumes of this journal, please contact me, again at jhardacre@ucsd.edu. I want Confluence to be a collaborative project that anybody who has something interesting to say can be a part of. Since coming to UCSD I have been desperately searching for opportunities to do something interesting or creative, outside of the usual “punching the clock” atmosphere. It is somewhat stifling and disappointing to see the way in which most of us treat everything here as being a pointless chore, not so much in terms of classes, but in terms of the actual experience of going to a university. That is why I have taken a tone and structure in this journal which is clearly not academic. Instead I want this journal to be more artistic than scholarly, a place where people can present interesting thoughts and something people can read to file off some of that dross which builds up after too much time spent in a formulaic academic setting. If you have something interesting to say I can assure you that we would be happy to have your article in here. You also certainly do not have to be a UCSD student, anybody interested is more than welcome. The journal’s “theme” is philosophy, religion, and art, but as long as your writing is at least tenuously related to these things please contact me and we can work on Volume 2. Your work does not necessarily need to be in the same format as mine either, it could be visual, film reviews, narratives, really anything you want so long as the ideas presented are novel and interesting. Anyway, thank you again for reading.