Humanities 4:
Lecture 23
Novalis, Faith and Love,
Fragments from the Notebooks
Brief Biography

- 1772-1801
- Georg Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis)
- Studied law, philosophy and history in Jena
- Worked in mining admin.
- Friends with Schiller, Schlegels, met Goethe, influenced by Schleiermacher.
- Hymns to the Night
- Died of tuberculosis
Historical Background

• Earlier Kings: Frederick I, Frederick Wilhelm I (=Soldier King), Frederick II (=Frederick the Great, pro-Enlightenment)

• King Frederick Wilhelm II (1786-1797)
  - Anti-Enlightenment
    + esp. in religious matters
  - Depleted economic & military strengths (e.g., with extravagant court) on eve of Napoleonic era

• King Frederick Wilhelm III (1797-1840)
  - Married Louise of Mecklenburg-Strelitz
  - Talented and armed with good intentions, but unlucky in execution/timing
Intellectual Background
Central Features of GR

- The Infinite
  - Anti-systematic, anti-rational, incomplete
  - Symbolism as requisite form of expression
- Imagination and subjectivity
  - Poetic creativity
  - Rejection of conventional norms
- Idealization of Nature
  - Unspoiled
  - Rural vs. civilized people
- The Exotic and the Supernatural
Novalis’ self-understanding of Romanticism: “The world must be romanticized.... When I give the commonplace a higher meaning, the customary a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the illusion of the infinite, I romanticize it” (Fr. #105).

- The infinite, symbolism, anti-rational, incompleteness, rejection of conventions.
Novalis’ Politics

- **Novalis’ view of Frederick William III & Louise**
  - Their love/union is fundamental and represents a recommendation for relations within the state that they govern.
  - “The court is the true model for a household. The higher households of the state are modeled after it, and the lower households after these higher ones, and so on” (#29).
  - “The king and queen protect the monarchy more than 200,000 troops [do]” (#34).
Novalis’ Political Theory (I)

• **Rejection of Enlightened Absolutism**
  - **State is akin to “factory” with mechanical administration, prosperous but too limited.**
  - **Like “squaring the circle” since raw self-interest is not truly limited thereby and leads to revolution. (#36)**

• **Rejection of Liberalism**
  - **Exaggerated value of freedom**
  - **Asocial (or individualistic) conception of man; insufficient sense of community.**

• **Both Enl. Abs. and Lib. lack intermediary entities (e.g., guilds, councils) that could buffer power and create social identities.**
Proposal: Organic Conception of State

State is like a living being, a person (Fr. #421 & 122)

- Plurality of parts that form a whole
- Work together according to different functions
- Sensitive to external circumstances & poetic!

- Allows for community and tradition, without sacrificing liberty and equality.

- Individuals can define themselves only through social interaction, so community is necessary for freedom.

- Love (in a community) is more powerful than self-interest.

- Love, not law, is the basis of political and social life.

- “What is a political union but a marriage?” (#36)
Novalis’ Method

- Series of sentences, typically no more than one paragraph
  - Not essays, letters, or other continuous method of explication.
- Special language: metaphoric, cryptic, vernacular, but still mysterious, even mystical. (#1-3).
- Emphasis on poetry