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The place of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775–1854) in the history of European philosophy is easily located: he was one of the major German thinkers who, in the wake of Kant's critical turn, elaborated the ambitious systematic philosophy known as 'absolute idealism', and the first of those thinkers to repudiate the rampant conceptualism of the idealist approach and to stress instead the priority of actuality over conceptual possibility. Woven throughout the fabric of the writings and lectures he produced over more than half a century is an enduring preoccupation with the question of God. Yet this is but one thread in Schelling's rich intellectual tapestry, one always interwoven with four counterparts: nature; the being both displayed and concealed in human reality; freedom or the peculiar moral-psychological status of 'personality', which only a free being (God included) can attain through a temporal process; and the divine actuality. These five elements – deity or godhead, nature, humankind, freedom and the historical process towards actual personhood – are not easily separated in Schelling's thinking, nor are these easily detached from the historical paradigms that Schelling used to integrate them: Platonic and Christian creation theologies; the heterodox process theologies of Jacob Böhme and earlier Christian mystics; and, finally, the audacious anthropocentrism of Kant's critical idealism, founded on the Copernican turn that finds in phenomena only such meaning as human understanding and moral reason can impute to them.

What makes Schelling a thinker difficult to access when one stands within the global culture of the twenty-first century is the one thing that he repeatedly stresses as he moves between such different conceptual approaches as philosophy of science, metaphysics, anthropology, history, and cross-cultural investigations into mythologies and religions: that human cognition forms a *system*, a single conceptual construct that elaborates the very architecture of being. That reality is in some sense one and univocal, that human concepts can figure it in a way that captures and mirrors exactly what it is, and that all the exploding domains of human endeavour and knowledge can find a ground in a single conceptual/

linguistic construct is an audacious claim. Strictly speaking, it is now an unbelievable claim. It was a difficult (perhaps hubristic) claim in its historical context; that the Kantian story of the efficacy of human reason in constructing the domains of scientific and moral discourse could be stretched by Fichte, Schelling and Hegel to include all human reality – social, psychological, cultural and historical – is literally ‘fabulous’, the stuff of fables. And the arch-fable, the *prōton pseudos*, is painful even to contemplate today: the belief that there is one universal culture, one universal history, one religion with universal validity, one logic, one epistemology, and one account of everything: modern, Archimedean and (of course!) European. When Schelling claims, then, at various stages of his long career, that nature, or the primacy of biology over physics, or history, or empirical studies of mythologies and religions will provide the royal road to *Wissenschaft* or systematic philosophy, he is committing himself to the old philosophical faith in universals, in univocal readings of texts, in literal meanings: to a unity believed to be found in the nature of things rather than in the activity of a cognitive interpreter. As skilled and clever a student of Kant as he was in his many detailed philosophical moves, Schelling was insufficiently sceptical or Kantian to see that any cognition or domain of human endeavour is an interpretation, that interpretations depend on a privileged selection of ‘evidence’ or ‘data’, and that a ‘universal history’ – of human science, social reality, cultures, and moral and religious ideas – is a conceptual impossibility, a social construct based on a particular social situation and a very specific historical configuration of human activities and resources. What makes Schelling more than an innocent victim of sociocultural limitations, however, was the persistent resourcefulness he exhibited in overcoming the ‘idols of his tribe’: early on, that nature is dead and mechanical, with biological phenomena counting as mere anomalies, not the fundamental subject of science; and later, that conceptual completeness is not the test of truth – as post-Kantian idealism had rather wildly assumed – but actual existence. However, it was in his ‘final’ approach to system, in the replacement of the merely negative (conceptual) philosophy of earlier idealisms with the method of *positive philosophy* (or ‘philosophical empiricism’), that he falls into being insufficiently historical, cross-cultural and empirical. The *Philosophies of Mythology and Revelation* of his later years, elaborated only in the lecture hall and untested by publication, unabashedly commit the fallacy of assuming that social empiricism or cross-cultural study will verify the initial assumption of one universal culture of reason or provide a point of Archimedean support for the hope in a philosophy of history with a single narrative thread. Alas, God (or the gods) does not speak so plainly as once we hoped.

For the most part, I shall discuss Schelling’s key contributions to philosophy of religion synchronically under the five headings mentioned above: nature, God, freedom, humankind and history or the manifestation of divine actuality. But first some historical scene-setting is needed: an account of his early life and writings, and of some of the friendships, loves and enmities that formed the personal

backdrop of his thinking. Until we broach the fifth theme, there is little to say on a classical topic in philosophy of religion, that is, proofs for the existence of God. For most of his life, Schelling argued that all of philosophy is the “ongoing proof of God”, and that the construction of a systematic account of reality from the *idea* of an absolute being is all that is needed (see VII.424 and the extensive discussion in IV.364–9).¹

SEMINARY STUDIES: PLATO, SPINOZA, KANT AND FICHTE

Schelling was born in 1775 to a clerical family in a Swabian village near Stuttgart. A precocious student, at the age of fifteen he found himself in the University of Tübingen's Protestant Seminary in the company of Friedrich Hölderlin and G. W. F. Hegel. There he made his first acquaintance with the writings of Kant, especially those in moral philosophy. A letter to Hegel from that period shows the student's contemptuous disrespect for the easy berth that Kant was getting in establishment Evangelical circles, where simple and ‘inevitable’ belief in a moral God dislodged the strenuous efforts of earlier theologians to prove the divine existence. While it is probable that Schelling and his older peers undertook careful and extensive study of Kant's first and third *Critiques* even at the time when Johann Gottlieb Fichte was working out his monumental systematization of critical philosophy, Schelling also explored other major figures of the German Enlightenment: he delved into Johann Gottfried Herder's ideas on history, language and religion, and through Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's polemical *Letters on Spinoza's Doctrine* he encountered the model of ‘dogmatic’ philosophy that would serve, along with Fichtean ‘Theory of Science’ (*Wissenschaftslehre*), as the twin foci of his early philosophical development. Just as he vacillates between Spinozistic ‘realism’ and Fichtean ‘transcendental philosophy’ in his earliest writings, Schelling struggles in his later life between the concept of a deity immersed in nature and in fact identified with natural and psychological processes, and a God of spontaneous freedom, love and self-revelation. What makes the tension between the alternatives poignant is the more basic assumption of the age and of the German intellectual culture that there is but one process at work, one mode of true cognition, one system.

Two texts from Schelling's seminary days prefigure themes of lifelong philosophical interest to him. His Masters thesis, *Attempt at a Critical and Philosophical Exegesis of Genesis III, the Oldest Philosophical Fragment Exploring the Origin of Human Evil* (1792) broaches the theme of human freedom and the origin of evil explored profoundly in the 1809 *Of Human Freedom*. It is also a first attempt to explore the sorts of truth communicated in *mythology*, understood to be a narrative

1. In-text references to Schelling's work are to his *Sämmtliche Werke* (1856–61), cited by volume and page numbers. All translations are mine.

fabricated within a limited historical and cultural content, and religious *revelation*, understood in the Enlightenment context as the communication of universal moral truths. The young theologian's attempt to deploy critique seem comically limited when read today – for example his insistence (I.13) that Moses learned the craft of indirect religious communication from the Egyptian priests and their hieroglyphs, and brought that to his 'authorship' of the great myths of cosmic and human origin in Genesis – but he makes bold assumptions: religious truth is universal and cross-cultural, and the stories of one cultural tradition speak truly only when set in the context of many cultures and many mythologies. The specific images of the snake, the prohibition, eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and the expulsion by the cherubim are to be viewed against the background of the ancient presupposition of an earlier 'golden age' of human unity and unity with nature, and of a catastrophic transition to the current human condition of lack, yearning and lost wholeness (I.17–19). And this universal mythology – elaborated in Ovid, Plato, Hesiod and Virgil – speaks timelessly of the human condition: either to ambiguously dwell in sensible nature and be led by its impulses as is any animal, or to wrench one's life away from the comfort zone of mundane satisfactions and attain the precarious happiness and unhappiness of the self-positing spontaneity of reason (I.32–8). The Enlightenment sensibilities of Herder and Kant are evident in Schelling's exegesis; both human freedom and historical existence begin with the forbidden tree, and once humankind acquires the taste for its particularly 'rational' fruit, nothing else can satisfy. A 1795 journal article, "On the Myths, Historical Sayings and Philosophical Fragments of the Ancient World", clarifies the idea of a philosophy communicated through myth. A people warrants its beliefs, values and modes of conduct by tradition; the sayings of the founders are received and repeated in an attitude of childlike trust. Whether what is passed down takes the shape of a historical narrative (*myth*, strictly speaking) or whether an abstract truth is embodied in such a narrative (*mythological philosophy*), the mode of communication is immediate. The ancient Greeks simply lived within the sensible (I.63–6). Human beings operating in the mode of sensibility express their lives, customs and ways of action in the *image*; all of nature becomes an image of human actuality. Only later, when childish dreams and pictures are put aside, does humanity seek to explain nature on its own terms: "Previously, humankind sought its image (*Bild*) in the mirror of nature, now it seeks the archetype (*Urbild*) of nature in its understanding, which is the mirror of the All" (I.73–7)]. For the young Schelling, mythology is a crude tool, hardly the plastic vehicle for the expression of religious truth, for example the coincidence of the universal and the individual, that he sees as the essence of Greek art and religion in the 1802 *Lecture on the Philosophy of Art*. Moreover, the young Schelling seems to hold the work of the imagination in low regard. Although he copied Hegel's ideas as expressed in *The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism* in his own hand in the *Earliest German System-Program*, he is worlds away from that author's vision of religion reconfiguring itself in the guise of a 'new mythology' in order to speak to an ethically and politically awakened world.

Schelling's recently published notebooks on Plato's *Timaeus* (1794) show a preoccupation with themes that dominate not only his early philosophy of nature, but also shape his later (and not especially biblical) theological speculation on the process of creation. Plato's Demiurge shapes natural forces not only by efficient causality, but also by looking to the model of 'things that truly are' (see Vol. 1, Ch. 4); it thus teleologically shapes all the disparate elements and motions of pre-given natural stuff into the organic interdependence of 'the living animal': organic nature. That organic life, anthropomorphically interpreted as a *nisus* toward the cognitive and affective self-determination of the conscious individual, is the secret urge and goal of all natural order, the noumenal ground of its scientifically observable lawfulness, is the key insight into the philosophy of nature that the young philosopher adumbrated to such acclaim in the years 1797–1804. It is Plato brought into the age when biology begins to displace physics as the paradigmatic science, or where young Germans, at least, ardently followed Goethe's anti-mechanistic ideas of colour and life rather than confining themselves to the cold rigours of Newton's elegant mathematics. Plato's *Timaeus*, along with Kant's *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment*, advances the 'likely story' (or 'wild' surmise) of a world organized with a view to reason and freedom, but one somehow consonant with the 'rule of necessity' or predictable force. How one makes that story plausible again in the age that sees, in England and France, if not in Germany, the triumph of a reductive empirical science is the narrative thread of Schelling's lifelong philosophical struggle. And it is the foundation of Schelling's ingenious solution to the problem of rational personality, whether divine or human: there must be a ground of necessity, namely nature, *from which* the free person departs in order to live in the ambiguous realm of choice and decision.

While a student at Tübingen, Schelling embarked on the tortuous discipleship or 'alliance' with Fichte that would first bring him to public prominence, and later (1797–1802) bring him into conflict with his mentor. The 1794 *On the Possibility of a Form for Philosophy As Such* loosely follows Fichte's methodological reflections in *On the Concept of 'Theory of Science'*. If there is to be philosophy as such, its form and content cannot be unrelated but must determine each other. The very idea of a foundational, self-evident and self-certifying philosophy carries with it the idea of three principles: one absolutely unconditional or self-realizing, one conditionally established in dependence on the first and one relatively unconditional, merging the first two; these are, respectively, the self-positing I, the not-I and the relative I of empirical consciousness, which is their synthesis (I.90–101). Schelling departs from Fichte in appending an anticipatory history of 'Theory of Science' in modern philosophy. What is most interesting in this regard is a discussion of Kant's (notoriously unexplained) table of categories; when viewed through the lens of 'Theory of Science', there is only one fundamental category, *relation*, variously instantiated as totality (the I), limitation of reality (the not-I) and causal interdependence (the I in interaction with not-I) (I.104–10).

When Fichte issued the first or theoretical section of the *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* in 1794, he did not acknowledge its incompleteness or indicate the dependence of the stuff of cognition (*presentation*) on the flow of non-conscious activities of the I (striving and counter-striving), which give rise to *feeling* or being-affected. Hence Schelling's 1795 *On the I as Principle of Philosophy* fails to do justice to the phenomenological psychology that grounds Fichte's view of freedom: that I as I experience myself as free only in a conditioned sense, as embedded in a world not of my making and not easily reshaped by my efforts. What it does is lucidly explain Fichte's use of Karl Leonhard Reinhold's method of arguing from an absolute or self-warranting principle: philosophy's foundational truth, if it is to be unconditioned, cannot at all be conceived as a thing; it can be thought only as *absolute I*, that which can never become a thing. "I am – because I am"; I am unthinkable except in so far as I think myself. The I is its self-realization, or self-positing, as Fichte said (I.167–8). Note that Schelling argues as a metaphysician (or a Spinozist), not as a phenomenologist: the notion that philosophy might proceed hypothetically and aggregate conditioned or empirical truths as it progresses is not even worthy of consideration. Only idealism permits one to adopt a ground of truth that is at the same time the ground of reality (I.162–3). If one supposed that Schelling was merely imitating Fichte in this essay, or providing the crabbed *Wissenschaftslehre* a much-needed popular exposition, one would underestimate him. Only the first third of the essay closely follows Fichte. Subsequent sections transpose the idealistic vocabulary of Fichte's I and not-I into Spinoza's language: the I must be "absolutely infinite"; it is the "sole substance of which all other items are merely accidents"; its domain is eternity, not the time of empirical consciousness; its being is *power* (I.187–96). The final third of the essay projects Fichte's principles back onto the structure of Kant's Transcendental Analytic in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, finding in the modal categories (dismissed by Kant as an epiphenomenon of temporal location) the ground of all others. The same ontological cleavage that would put possibility and necessity in opposition in fact contains the clue to solving the apparent impossibility of freedom and necessity coexisting. The freedom of the absolute, of the I, is self-causation or necessity according to Spinoza; the transcendental freedom that the conditioned or empirical I must ascribe to itself is conditioned agency, elicited in the phenomenal I as a response to the object, which on its own terms can never be conceived as anything other than a product of natural necessity. Freedom and nature are of different orders: one must think that in the absolute, mechanism and teleology coincide, and for the empirical I, such an identity becomes a heuristic principle in science and the space for the projection of goals in the domain of action (I.226–42).

While the essays on the I and the form of philosophy are clear-sighted Fichtean studies, done with the historian's eye turned back to the roots of Theory of Science in Kant's texts, especially the first *Critique*, Schelling shows some originality and anticipates some of the grand themes of the 'philosophy of identity' in the 1795

Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism (hereafter *Letters*). The main argument of the *Letters* is a defence of the strategy of Theory of Science: to provide a theoretical construct for the *freedom* that is the core of the human, which construct can only be validated practically, by will and action. Fichte's position is inserted between the letter of Kant's text – where the *weakness* of cognitive reason is made a stepping-stone to the postulation of a *moral God* and, subsequently, a weak theory of freedom – and a daring defence of Spinoza's dogmatic objectification of both the divine ground and the constrained freedom of the finite agent. Whereas Fichte's writings are of 'Kantian' derivation in that they take as the key to systematizing criticism Kant's chapter title in the second *Critique*, "The Primacy of the Practical", and argue for the superiority of criticism (now called *Wissenschaftslehre*, or 'theory of science') over dogmatism or the systematized realism of Spinoza, Schelling criticizes the mental and moral poverty of a 'criticism' confined to the texts of Kant, where a weak cognitive reason allies itself with an impulsive and ill-motivated moral reason that simply postulates an 'objective God' that it desires but cannot know, and through which it desires, rather cravenly, to reassure itself about its own 'morality' (I.284–92). The message of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not the weakness of cognitive reason, but the antinomical nature of reason, which gives rise simultaneously and with equal plausibility to realism (the necessity of nature) and idealism (the purposiveness of the free agent). Realism, in its perfect form as a Spinozistic axiomatized system, is unable to prove itself because it must leave forever obscure the link between the absolute and the relative, or the "egress of the finite from the infinite" (I.294, 313–14). Idealism, which is basically a seizing of the stance of freedom, a self-ascription of absolute causality or spontaneity in the face of the explanation of phenomena through the serial causality of the objective order, is equally unable to validate itself, argues Schelling. It can do no more than prove the impossibility of dogmatic realism (I.301–2).

Schelling echoes Fichte's words that the choice between realism and idealism is made with one's feet, existentially, with one's lived commitments (I.307–8). But Fichte believed that only one of the paths carried the dignity of real human endeavour, and that a person whose life and character drew her to an unbending world of finished objectivity 'outside' was basically slavish and incapable of spontaneous activity. Schelling argues that Spinoza and Fichte face the same philosophical task: to explain the *existence of the world* or, what is the same thing, of *experience* (I.313). Each raises himself to an act of *intelligence* (not understanding), and posits an absolute: Fichte, *intellectual* (or non-objective) *intuition* of self in the self; Spinoza, annihilation of the finite self in the *intellectual love of God* (I.319). In both cases, the finite or objective disappears. Schelling seems to endorse the equivalence of the alternatives: each of the two, realism and idealism, aims at the identity of the subject and the object, which would really mean *loss* of finite self and *loss* of world – *if* the project could be carried out (I.330). In the end, the only thing that differentiates realism and idealism is that the former leaps into the absolute and abolishes the self *tout court*, while idealism or Theory of Science

uses absolute identity as a postulate made for the sake of free activity, and thus approaches the absolute only as the *goal of an endless task* (I.331).

NATURE

After leaving the Tübingen seminary, Schelling spent some years as a tutor and studied the natural sciences at Stuttgart. In Robert Brown's experiments with molecular movement, Schelling detected a key that seemed to link the mechanical activity of inorganic nature and the self-organizing and self-maintaining activity of the biological order. He formulates a view of science that prizes two structural or organizing ideas: that nature is purposive or goal-oriented (the *teleological principle*), and that the lawfulness of natural phenomena derives from the repetition and clarification of but one logic, manifest in various orders as *powers* or exponents of the basic formula of identity-in-difference (the *principle of potentiation*). That nature *might be* regarded as self-organizing activity or an expression of an underlying and pervasive *telos* whose nature is finally unveiled in human consciousness is an idea whose historical antecedents lie in Plato and Kant. That different levels of phenomena – physical, biological and psychological – express the same underlying activity and thus repeat a basic logic in a progressively more explicit fashion may have been suggested by Spinoza's dictum that the order and expression of power in nature is the same as that expressed in the order of mind and its sequence of ideas. These two quite abstract principles frame the project of *Naturphilosophie*, which set out to provide a conceptual framework for organizing all natural phenomena into one 'science': quite a different project from the methodological and clarificatory reflections that we call 'philosophy of science'. The framework is *a priori* (or, less charitably, empirically unfounded) and is imposed on the findings of the 'working' empirical sciences only to the degree, as both Plato and Kant recognized, that there is a human need to fabricate a *story* that might make nature one and comprehensible.

What made the young philosopher's contributions to this sort of 'learning' interesting at the end of the eighteenth century was his solid grasp of contemporary empirical research and his skill in weaving the detailed theories of different domains into a unified picture. But the emphasis in *Naturphilosophie* is philosophical, not empirical. As Schelling expresses it in his first attempt at the subject, "It is true that chemistry has taught us to read the *elements*, physics the *syllables*, mathematics *nature* [as a whole], but one should not forget that it falls to philosophy to *explain* what was read" (II.6). And philosophy's mode of explanation is self-analysis, the transcendental question of how the world of experience is possible for consciousness, or, in the language of earlier episodes in modern philosophy, how our activity organizes a mass of cognitive content (presentations) into a world of experience, with both its physical and sociohistorical dimensions. The knot of necessity and freedom in the undertaking wherein I resolve to clarify the

nature of my mind and action and end by constraining it in a world of matter and mechanical causality cannot be cut, for if *my* act is to perceive and my freedom the only explanation of that act, the necessary order of my presentation is the lawfulness that I come to recognize as the Idea of Nature (II.35). In the transcendental perspective, only mind can explain ideal factors: order, succession, lawfulness. Nature is a transcendental construct.

Subsequent explorations of the philosophy of nature (from 1798 to 1801) move away from the Fichtean transcendental framework of analysis to the core conceptual perplexity: how can one conceive the overlay of organic nature on the inorganic? For Schelling, the heart of the conundrum is metaphysical, not empirical: the conviction, inherited from Reinhold and Fichte, that since principles must be one or few and their outworking systematic or pervasive, there must be a common point of origin for *mechanism* (which traces the first causes of alteration in physical nature) and *teleology* (which reveals the final ground of activity in organic nature). As Schelling wrote in the Preface to *The World-Soul* (1798), this common point can at first only be postulated, and can be denominated only symbolically through antique terms such as the 'Idea of Nature' or 'World Soul'. One can speak of the line of mechanical causality being "interrupted and turned back upon itself" in living phenomena, but there is certainly conceptual difficulty in supposing that one force or lawfulness will manifest itself in contradictory ways (II.347–50). This metaphysical perplexity drives the development of Schelling's philosophy in the period of his so-called 'philosophy of identity' (1801–4).

That nature is the gradual unveiling of the power of consciousness and novelty within a structure dominated by automatic or homeostatic organization (physics) and mutually supporting differentiated functions (biology) is an obvious idea viewed in the context of Renaissance humanism, or a preposterous idea viewed in the context of philosophical empiricism. For us, Darwinian evolution validates the idea in a way that abolishes the difference between mechanism and teleology. What makes Schelling's (and later Hegel's) excursions into 'the metaphysics of science' both fascinating and difficult for contemporary readers is that the glue that holds the cosmos together for him comes from 'ideas' (in the full Platonic and Kantian sense), not from the history of biological adaptation. At this stage, Schelling does not give a theistic face to this post-Kantian version of the Renaissance idea of the 'great chain of being', although he will speak metaphorically of a 'World Soul' or demiurgic organizing principle. If one pressed him at this point for a further account of just why nature pointed towards consciousness as its goal and expressed its activity in graduated stages, he would fall back on Spinoza's minimalistic metaphysics: one substance, call it God or Nature, and two equal but different orders of phenomena, the physical and the mental, expressing the same logic when viewed cognitively, and expressing the same power viewed affectively.

In the 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling still adheres to the genetic expository framework of Fichte's Theory of Science, but in the final three sections of the work (on history, teleology and philosophy of art) one can see

him mounting to a new overall conceptual structure or metaphysics, different from Fichte's 'subjective' postulation of indemonstrable principles through an act of freedom grounded in 'intellectual self-intuition'. Schelling argues that beyond nature and the domain of human consciousness is an absolute domain, phenomenologically adumbrated in forms of higher culture – ethics, politics, history, science and art – but strictly beyond the reach of philosophy's methodology and argument. The artist becomes the surrogate of the philosopher confined in her subjectivity or the prophet/priest who can dream of an absolute order, but cannot supply objectivity or evidence to such claims. The work of art is at once a natural product and a work of freedom; the aesthetic 'genius' consciously undertakes its production, but unconsciously imbues her work with more than finite significance. It is thus the analogue of the absolute and an indication of an ultimate harmonization of the opposed order of nature and human freedom (III.624–9). While Schelling worked to develop a dialectical metaphysics of identity over the next three or so years, he continued to privilege the domain of art, where ultimate reality enters the realm of appearances in a finite shape (as in the Greek gods). Allied briefly with Hegel as a co-worker from 1801 to 1803, Schelling worked on a tripartite system of philosophy that privileges aesthetics as its capstone, while the young Hegel worked on a similar scheme culminating in philosophy of religion. They named this movement 'absolute' or 'objective' idealism to differentiate it from the Fichtean construct of transcendental philosophy that (supposedly) never left the confines of 'subjective idealism' (or psychologism).

Schelling's more technical efforts to fuse the divided realms of nature, ethics, and aesthetics resulted in several essays in 'identity philosophy' in the later years of his overall preoccupation with the Kantian domains of nature and aesthetics, chiefly the *Presentation of My System* (hereafter *Presentation*; 1801) and the dialogue *Bruno* (1802). Inspired by Spinoza's metaphysics of one substance manifested in coordinated but opposite orders of attributes, Schelling makes the radical claim that philosophy has access to the absolute through reason or intellectual intuition (IV.117–19). He thus elevates the epistemic status of philosophy over that of art, reversing claims made in 1800. What can the philosopher do that the aesthetic genius could only blindly adumbrate? She can deploy a formal mathematical model, positing the absolute as an identity of (relative) identities, or an 'identity of identity and difference', and provide a structural or quasi-mathematical model of nature as a realm of phenomena determined in all levels by a preponderance of objectivity over subjectivity, alongside a realm of consciousness or ideal phenomena where subjectivity outweighs objectivity. Key to the theory is the stipulation that although 'absolute identity' is the only entity or activity that can be imagined, it can appear only as a healing-over of a rupture of difference, seen in the way phenomena arranged themselves in realms of opposites. There is only identity, but all that appears is identity-in-difference or *indifference* (IV.127–9). The theory never defines what 'the subjective' and 'the objective' might be in themselves; its plausibility depends on a poetic approximation of *subjectivity* to

human consciousness and of *objectivity* to a supposedly external order of nature. What Spinoza treated as the distinct order of attributes is the same as Kant's distinct orders of phenomena. The former's imperceptible *substance* is regarded as the same as Kant's unembodied *transcendental* or *rational unity of consciousness*, and, methodological niceties aside, the 'modern stance' of transcendently grounded phenomenalism is assimilated to earlier forms of rational metaphysics. The conceptual gain for Schelling in these rather arid logical moves comes with the stipulation that all phenomena can be analysed as the 'quantitative difference' of factors that are qualitatively indifferent in the absolute; this allows the various stages or 'potencies' of phenomena to be arranged and displayed in a quasi-mathematical way. Thus the claim can be advanced that "absolute identity is not the cause of the universe, but the universe itself", the Romantics' *hen kai pan* (one and all).

GOD

Schelling's pursuit of a unified philosophy of nature gave way to essays and lectures in 1801-3 that attempted to recast the arid formalism of the 1801 *Presentation* in classical aesthetic, even Neoplatonic modes. The emergence of differentiated phenomena from the ground of absolute identity proved a difficult problem for Schelling: Spinoza had maintained that there is no explaining the egress of the finite from the infinite, and Kantian transcendentalism provided no model for going beyond phenomena to an existing ultimate ground. So Schelling reverts to the language of Platonism, transposing the graded identities-in-difference of the mathematical model of nature and consciousness into *absolute ideas*, of which their phenomenal counterparts are regarded as 'fallen' or self-separated individuals. Working backwards from Kant to Spinoza to Plato, Schelling finds himself in the milieu of the creation stories in Christian theology, and he thus finds himself having to think through the themes of will, individuation, and the 'fallenness of nature'. Operating off the capital of Greek aesthetics and Neoplatonic metaphysics, Schelling, a quintessentially 'modern' or contemporary thinker, hardly notices that he has returned to his theological starting-points until a contemporary mathematician and scientist, Carl Eschenmayer, points out that with his 'absolute' thus platonically construed, Schelling had entered the domain of 'God talk' whose object is commonly thought to be accessible only to faith or religious intuition (VI.18). The 1804 essay "Philosophy and Religion", written while Schelling was lecturing at Würzburg, shows Schelling's recognition of this theological turn. Henceforth, although never quite surrendering the philosopher's claim to 'systematic philosophy', the centre of Schelling's endeavour will be to philosophically situate the worldview of Christian theology in which divine creation, the 'fall' from grace or self-separation, freedom and the rupture between God and nature become the predominant themes.

The 1804 essay claims that God or the 'idea of the absolute' is grasped by the philosopher in *intellectual intuition*, but can be translated into the language of *reflection* or second-hand explanation in three ways: the categorical pronouncements of negative theology, the hypothetical reasoning of Spinoza's self-identical substance ("If there is a subject and an object, the absolute is the identical essence of both orders" [VI.23]), or the disjunctive approach of *Naturphilosophie*, wherein the absolute is seen as the 'indifference' of both. Schelling confronts the difficulties of explaining individuation or the 'fall of the finite' from the absolute in a fairly oblique way: the possibility of the individual resides in the absolute only as 'idea', the actuality thereof lies in an inexplicable 'leap', a self-willed succession from the absolute (VI.38). Eschenmayer posed a more difficult problem for Schelling's nature- or identity-philosophy by raising the question of freedom and moral responsibility (VI.40ff.). Schelling grandly declares that in God, freedom and necessity are identical, and morality and blessedness are God's intrinsic properties; this makes the return to divine being the flipside of the phenomenal individual's succession from God, but offers little explanation of how 'willing' is possible at all in an absolute system that identifies (divine) being with necessity and with a timeless mode of knowing in the philosopher. Taking the cosmic perspective where the question of human willing is not so much solved as dissolved, he advances an oracular statement that prefigures the process-theology framework of the essay on *Human Freedom and Ages of the World*: "History is an epic composed within God's spirit; it has two chief parts: the first depicts the departure of humanity from the center to the utmost distance from God, the second, its return. The first is the *Iliad*, as it were, of history, the second, its *Odyssey*" (VI.47). As for the supposed immortality of the human soul, Schelling briefly argues that its being (but not necessarily its duration) is *eternal*, and that the separation of the soul from the sensible world in death is its restoration to the 'eternal present' that includes past and future, where its self-centred freedom is transformed into a state of guilt or one of purification from guilt (VI.61–2). The treatment of the human soul is cursory in this essay, and lacks both the feeling and the curiosity of the dialogue *Clara* (1810), written shortly after the death of Schelling's wife, Caroline.

FREEDOM

The last of his writings that Schelling was to publish during his lifetime, the 1809 *Human Freedom*, returns to themes that Schelling had sketched in the 1804 essay on religion: the non-difference of God and nature, history as humanity's journey away from and back to its divine centre, and the problem of freedom – which were fudged in the earlier essay. Although he admits in the introduction that the presentation of these ideas was flawed in the earlier essay, Schelling now serves notice that the questions of freedom, good and evil, and the actuality of a personal God are at the core of his philosophical system, and that the apparent 'pantheism' of

the Spinozistic 'nature-philosophy' that had previously stood as his system is to be replaced by a 'system of freedom' (VII.334–40). The impulse to vindicate the horizon of human *agency* is the spring or motor that drives human cognition, while the identity of reason imposes, as Kant had taught, the logical demand that all knowledge be integrated into a logical whole, a *system*. So neither science nor morality can be satisfied with a worldview that offers necessity and freedom on an either/or basis. There must, instead, be a *system of freedom*, no matter how contradictory that sounds to the unphilosophical ear.

The logical and metaphysical foundation for the earlier nature- and identity-systems had been a symmetrical and non-dynamic notion of identity: $A = A$. Schelling had massaged the bare identity concept, now construing it as an 'identity of identities', or as (under the young Hegel's influence) an 'identity of opposites', but most often as 'indifference' or the lack of actual opposition between items conceptually opposed, that is, in exclusive disjunction. But as ingenious as all these attempts to build a dynamic or developmental feature into absolute identity were, Schelling's early systems never got beyond the flat contradictions that characterized the system of earlier thinkers: the finite and infinite orders in Spinoza, the antinomy of necessity and freedom in Kant and the contraction between positing and counter-positing in Fichte's Theory of Science. Schelling was indeed able to organize levels of phenomena in inorganic and organic nature in terms of degrees of apparent freedom; this was the principle of the 'powers' or *Potenzen*. But, lacking either a conceptual or a biological principle of variation and growing complexity, the systems of nature and spirit were at best taxonomical exercises in description, possessing neither systematic unity nor a uniform principle of elaboration. We are so accustomed to explaining the relations between different phenomena in terms of the Darwinian mechanism of random mutation and inherited advantage that it is difficult to conceive the challenge that faced early-nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft*: how to account for the complexity and variation of phenomena and yet attain the unity of principle that the ideal of systematicity demanded. As Heidegger remarked in his lectures on Schelling's *Human Freedom*, we have simply abandoned the ideal of systematicity; the so-called information age has galaxies of techniques, technologies and cognitive disciplines receding from each other in a logical space marked by 'red shift' or paradigm redundancy. We do not much care that a deep unity is not to be found, or that the lawfulness of phenomena seems to be established independent of the universality of logic.

In the essay on freedom, Schelling first uses the crude objection to Spinoza's monism – that it is '*pantheism*', meaning that either finite beings as a whole or each one individually are 'identical' to God – to re-tool his notion of identity. That the finite being is 'in God' means not logical identity, but a relationship of dependence: the copula in a judgement denotes not equivalence, but a relationship of antecedent and consequent. The absolute identity required by the very concept of system thus encompasses both the flat-footed law of identity and the law of sufficient reason. If the 'creature', then, has the ground of its being in the divine

and must be conceived in and through the eternal, that does not determine the nature of the dependent entity, and so does not rule out its autonomy or freedom (VII.340–46).

Secondly, Schelling clarifies his long-standing criticism of Fichte's system: that it is 'subjective idealism'. The fault is not in its idealism, but in its narrowing the scope of philosophy to the perspective of the finite I. The real-idealism of nature-philosophy requires a wholly idealistic counterpart, a philosophy of will, not of being. "Will is primordial being; all predicates apply to it alone – groundlessness, eternity, independence from time, self-affirmation" (VII.330).

Even these two moves, however, will not suffice to generate a concept of *human freedom*, that is, agency coupled with cognition of possibilities and moral responsibility. Idealism can provide only a formal definition of freedom; actual freedom implies agency with the possibility of *good and evil* outcomes. The question of the actuality of human freedom transforms into the question of theodicy; whether God is a co-author of evil. Schelling rejects the Augustinian notion of evil as mere privation, and insists instead that actual freedom must be grounded in something independent of God, if evil is not to be credited to the eternal's account. What is required for the actuality of evil or the efficacy of human freedom is a basis in God that is not Godself (VII.352–6).

The intricate argument circles back to the reinterpretation of absolute identity: sufficient reason denotes not just a logical relationship, but an ontological one – *ground and existence*. What is required for the reality of human freedom (and hence the existence of evil) and for the exculpation of the divine is "an element in God that is not God" (VII.359), a pre-personal basis for personal existence. 'Nature' is this ground of the divine existence and the stage for the actualization of the human potential for good and evil. Conceived in dynamic or volitional terms, it is a pre-rational orientation toward the rational, an inarticulate longing to give birth to God: a primal longing or imagination turning towards God, but not recognizing God (VII.358–61).

It would take us too far afield to discuss the influence of Böhme and other Protestant mystics on this notion of the divine unfolding from a pre-rational ground. That God's being can be mapped as a tripartite process of self-enclosure, decision and becoming personal (i.e. manifesting itself as spirit or love) provides an economic framework for interpreting the Trinity. What is philosophically most basic in this scheme is its dependence on anthropology: pre-rational and rational urges contend in the human domain, self-will stands in contrast to universal reason and the individual secures concrete existence only in her choice, her action, her decision. "The human's being is essentially his or her own deed" (VII.383). But it is in this dual tendency to self-enclosure and to universal community that the word of God is articulated and the possibility of spirit revealed (VII.363–4).

One should not be misled by the language of orthodox theism that Schelling employs. The creation of the human order with its opposed capacities is *morally necessary* for divine revelation, the *sine qua non* for God becoming actual and

personal (VII.402). There is no person without an other, and no love without a counterpart that is both logically and ontologically independent of the lover. So God's becoming actual – love rather than the undifferentiated swell of forces in the primal godhead or *Ungrund* – depends on the human actuation of freedom. And the actuation of freedom means the whole sweep of human history, with its multifaceted instantiation of every possibility of good and evil. With the monolithic identity of mere nature left behind, the actual God, the Word in the form of humanity suffers through all of human history, while the attractive ideal force, the personal God or Spirit, presses on (as ideal) toward some final crisis, some decision, some division of good from evil.

A final section of the argument vindicates Schelling's claim that the philosopher can have both system and a lively sense of freedom and personality. What guarantees system is the prior nature of God, the *Ungrund* or indifference of ground and existence; it is undifferentiated being, the counterpart of Spinoza's substance. Only when creative decision separates nature from freedom, longing from reason, and binds the two in an utterly fragile way in humankind, is there development, process, evolution and the possibility of love as the reunification of the broken pieces (VII.409–12). Although Schelling will explore 'personal' or 'evolutionary theology' again in the many drafts of *Ages of the World* (1811–15), those fragmentary attempts to depict the 'past of God' or God without humanity lack the sheer intellectual and emotional power of the insistently anthropocentric – or incarnational – theology of the essay on *Human Freedom*. It is a darker picture of revelation than orthodox theology usually presents, and a much darker picture of human history than the Enlightenment usually suggests: "All history remains incomprehensible without the concept of a humanly suffering God", one embedded in all the sordid adventures of humankind (VII.401).

HUMAN NATURE

In the wake of his wife's death in 1809, Schelling produced two works, both somewhat cryptic and incomplete, that considered God's counterpart, humanity, and its role in the elaboration of the divine being. The *Stuttgart Private Lectures* (1810) offer a synoptic view of Schelling's new 'system of freedom', while the dialogue *Clara* explores traditional questions on the immortality of the human soul, albeit from the unusual perspective of the phenomenon of hypnosis or 'animal magnetism' as advocated by F. A. Mesmer. Both works present a view of human rationality or personality as founded on the irrational, or the natural basis of human faculties that, left on its own, manifests as madness (VII.469–70). The irrational in the human corresponds to the 'natural' element in God, or mere being (*das Seyn*), from which God distinguishes Godself as personal or actualized being (*das Seyende*). This process of divine evolution is identical with the creation of humanity, since God effects in it the evocation of consciousness out of the unconscious, or of spirit

(intelligence) out of matter (VII.435–6). Humanity pertains to *non-being*, to that which *ought not* be, and from which, when wrongly posited as something in itself, disease, madness and moral evil manifest. This same force in God, self-love or *egoism*, is that whereby God is a unique or isolated particular. It is only through the counterbalancing power of *love* that God becomes infinitely communicative and expansive, the being of all beings. Creation, or evocation of the ideal from the real, begins with God's 'moral' act: the subordination of self-will to love (VII.438–9). The canvas of human history depicts the struggle between the forces of egoism and love, and the relative indecision of peoples and individuals over whether they wish to pertain to nature (*Seyn*) or to spirit (*das Seyende*). Schelling's theogony is still riveted on the spectacle of "a humanly suffering God" (VII.403; cf. IV.252).

God is absolutely free since God possesses absolute, active being, whereas the human being is free in a derivative sense: free from divine determination because she possesses a ground independent of God (namely, nature) and free from nature in having the divine fire kindled within her. The human ought to be the point where nature is transfigured into spirit and the continuity of all realms of being is established, but because the human realm has actuated the natural or egocentric principle, nature has instead become independent of spirit and taken on the aspect of temporality: the first period of life, or the antechamber to spirit (VIII.457–9). The detachment of the human realm from its proper place, the middle ground between the non-being of nature and the absolute being of God, has distorted the three powers or faculties that make up human reality: affect (*Gemüth*), mind (*Geist*) and soul (*Seele*). Each of these powers – conceived as a capacity for action, and not merely a state of being – has three aspects.

The three aspects of *affect* are: longing (which tends to manifest as melancholy), desire (hunger for being) and feeling (which has a cognitive, although not conscious, flavour to it) (VII.465–6). The second or mental level of powers is opposed to the first (affect); in general, it is the domain of consciousness. Its three aspects are: *egocentric will*, *understanding* and *will as such* (which, under the influence of disposition and egoistic will, tends to manifest as choice of evil) (VII.467–8). The third power (soul) is the principle of connection or continuity between the first two. Its aspects are: impersonal, unconscious and non-deliberative. Mind has knowledge, but the soul is said to be science itself; mind can be good, but soul is goodness itself. As the hidden divine spark, soul can relate itself to the emotional and egocentric element and express itself in art and poetry. Or it can relate itself to the highest element in the first two powers and express its inchoate grasp of reality as philosophy. Or it can relate itself to will and express itself as morality. Or it can act unconditionally, and then the sphere of its activity is religion (VII.471–3). Disordered relations in all three categories result in affective disorders, cognitive incapacities such as nonsense, or madness when understanding and soul miscommunicate. Madness is not a specific disorder, but a manifestation of the non-being or irrationality that lies at the basis of human reality: "In brief, it is precisely the irrational that constitutes the very ground of our understanding"

(VII.470). Schelling's psychological realism is startling: human reality, which should be solidly in the centre of things, is precarious!

The human being was supposed to be the creature of the centre, the point of continuity between nature and spirit. Instead of using her freedom to elevate nature into spirit, the human being instead reached back into nature, temporalized her existence and thus postponed the realization of spirit from the present – life within nature – to a spiritual world *after death*. Schelling conceives 'nature' and 'spirit' here as volitional modes, self-absorbed ego or communicative outreach, so that death is not so much the separation of mind and body as the separation of good and evil (VII.474–6; see also IX.32–3). Delivered to her own ideal world, but not necessarily God's, the whole person continues to exist, but consciousness functions immediately in the presence of its objects, and not as mediated through the senses. Post-death experience is akin to clairvoyance or a 'wakeful sleep' in which the good remember only the good and the evil only evil (VII.477–8; see also IX.65–6). In *Clara* he argues in detail that in the spiritual order God is directly the cause of the person's perceptions, the way the hypnotizer is the cause of the perceptions – deemed unusual by us – in the one hypnotized (IX.72). That God can in this way be the one mind of the spirit world comes from the existential disparity between God and the human creature; the former is active existence or agency (*das Seyende*), the latter mere being (*Seyn*). The objects to be encountered in the spirit world are much the same as those in the natural world, but intuited only in a mental manner: "The world of spirit is God's poetry, while nature is God's sculpture" (VII.480). The more one has re-enacted the primordial moral act of freedom and subjected one's particular will to love, the more one is likely to be absorbed into the divine being in the spirit world; conversely, the more one has persisted in self-centred will, the more one will be separate. All of these naturalistic features that Schelling ascribes to post-mortem existence follow from "heaven's perfect worldliness" (IX.99).

THE DIVINE ACTUALITY

In 1815, Schelling delivered an address called *The Deities of Samothrace* to the Bavarian Academy of Sciences, with the aim of empirically reinforcing the highly speculative vision that *Ages of the World* advanced of there being an 'eternal past' preserved in God. In the address Schelling contends that there is a primal human wisdom that maintains, in some faulty way, memory of both human and divine origins, and which is passed down in ancient mythologies. Returning to the view of his early seminary essays on mythology, he contends that the succession of deities pictured in Greek, Phoenician and Egyptian mythologies points especially to a natural basis of longing that is the beginning of the birth of rational personality in God – and, of course, to the transition from figurative polytheism to monotheistic religion (VIII.350). Thus begins Schelling's journey towards

'positive philosophy', expounded in the lecture halls of Munich and Berlin, heard by students as different as Kierkegaard and Lenin, but never committed to print.

In *Lectures on History of Modern Philosophy* given in Munich after Hegel's death (the manuscript dates from 1833–4), Schelling repudiates the whole of his early philosophy – 'identity philosophy' being subsumed under the title *Naturphilosophie* – and the whole of Hegel's system as well as mere 'negative' or 'conceptual philosophy'. His early philosophy, admits Schelling, bore no relation to *existence* or to anything *real*, and hence when it treated the idea of God or the highest actuality it was merely playing with relationships that that idea takes on in human thought. We might say it was only conceptual analysis and totally vacant of significance since the question of God's reality was never posed. The constructions of idealistic philosophy are a grand sham, not an ontological proof writ large (X.125). This 'negative philosophy' was faulty not only in its use of *a priori* reasoning or 'construction', but also in importing a false developmental perspective into its idea of God. The point is not simply that the idea of deity undergoes development in its philosophical presentation, but that God is presented as the product of an objective process of development, as an evolution from natural force to rational love; God is thus present only in the end, as a result, and the so-called divine history (portrayed in works such as *Human Freedom* and *Ages of the World*) is everywhere confounded with human history and the path of thought pursued by the philosopher. Rightly understood, there is no becoming in God, and if one wants to picture this as God coming to grasp Godself, either the process is eternal and hence not a process, or the movement of *becoming* is personal and communicative, and the force of love in history was nothing but the movement of thought, an event in the philosopher's subjectivity (X.124–5). If these remarks repudiate the finite, developmental approach in conceptualizing the divine reality found in Schelling's philosophies of nature and freedom, they cut more radically against the dialectical style of Hegel's version of 'objective idealism', which plainly makes the divine reality a result dependent on a logical process and which moves from mere thought to reality only by a dialectic sleight of hand (X.126–8).

If Schelling in the end rejects the development or process view of deity implicit in the philosophy of nature and explicitly adopted in *Human Freedom*, how is the divine reality to be conceived? In a segment of an 1836 Munich lecture course that served as an introduction to philosophy, and which his editor-son issued under the title *Exposition of Philosophical Empiricism*, Schelling reverted to classical modes of thought to undercut the dualism inherent in modern philosophy which, focusing as it does on *presentation* or *perception*, can never get beyond the subject–object opposition. He uses the Pythagorean principles of *apeiron* and *peras*, and Plato's *monad* and *dyad*, to ascend to the idea of a 'highest cause', at once cause and substance (or self-caused), which brings together the relative pairs and overcomes the sheer relativity of the material or indefinite principle through the limitation imposed by the ideal, defining element (X.245–55). Only this independent and fully actual being (*das Seyende*) is capable of establishing the potentiality for being

in the two relative or quasi-actual principles (*das Seynkömmende*), and only with all three principles together – that which ought not be, that which should be and the ultimate cause – do we philosophically come to something that corresponds to the biblical description of God as ‘Lord of Being’ (X.264–5). “The highest concept of God, hence the highest concept in general, is that which defines God as absolute independence, as fully real in itself and completely internally elaborated”; substance trumps causality when it comes to the divine reality (X.279).

That Schelling reverts to classical modes of thought in his final writings on philosophy of religion and turns away from the ‘process’ or ‘historical’ theology of his middle years is somewhat surprising. Nevertheless, the ontological difference between actuality, agency and freedom (denoted by *das Seyende*) and potentiality, passivity, and other-determination (denoted by *Seyn*), first introduced in *Human Freedom*, continues to play an important role in Schelling’s thought, providing him with a philosophical means to re-establish the sense of divine transcendence that the negative philosophy compromised. The difference between freedom and being, or the superiority of agency over mere existence, is the enduring *idealistic* element in Schelling’s philosophy of religion.

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On IDEALISM see also Chs 16, 19. On MYTHOLOGY see also Ch. 15; Vol. 1, Ch. 2. On NATURE/NATURALISM see also Ch. 10; Vol. 3, Chs 20, 21, 22; Vol. 5, Ch. 4. On REVELATION see also Ch. 11; Vol. 1, Ch. 14; Vol. 2, Ch. 11; Vol. 3, Chs 7, 11, 16; Vol. 5, Chs 8, 23. On SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS see also Chs 2, 4, 10, 13.