

The State as Organism of Freedom: The Search for Schellings Political Philosophy

I hope to offer you this afternoon a very summarized account of the results of my search for Schelling's political philosophy. To do this, I must make clear the parameters of my search. First factor is as obvious as it is problematic: given that Schelling never wrote a treatise dedicated to political philosophy, we have no clear text on which to focus. Second factor, in inverse fashion, compounds the difficulties caused by the first: due to Schelling's lengthy and productive career we are faced in with finding a coherent pattern of his political thinking in over thousands of pages of text composed over the course of his 70 years of writing. And if these purely quantifiable difficulties weren't enough, we face perhaps the most daunting challenge in the very nature of Schelling's art of philosophizing: Unlike the three acknowledged giants of German Idealism - Kant, Fichte and Hegel - Schelling never sought to offer up one unchanging system of philosophy. Rather, [rework metaphor] like the wines of a challenging domain in Bordeaux, over the course of his long career, different years often yielded different results, as he relentlessly worked the *vay vignes* of philosophy, never ceasing to call into question his own ideas in the face of new developments.ⁱ

Unlike Hegel, who once wrote "That philosophy, like geometry, is teachable, and must no less than geometry have a regular structure"ⁱⁱ Schelling holds that, since philosophy is the highest act of freedom, the activity of doing philosophy is not only inherently creative, but must always reflect the unique character of the person engaged in this activity. In stark contrast to what would become Hegel's rather megalomaniacal celebration of one method and system of philosophy, Schelling insists that because a philosophy must be "constructed by the individual student himself," any such "system" can only be "perspectival" and thus a limited account of the

“universal ... system of human knowing” (I/1, 447; 457). Highly critical of modernity’s embrace of quantifiable form as the paradigm through which to understand our knowledge of reality, Schelling embraces an organic and developmental model in which, for example, “all progress in philosophy [is] only progress through *development*; every individual system which earns this name can be viewed as a seed which indeed slowly and gradually, but inexorably and in every direction, advancing itself in multifarious development” (I/1, 457). The telos of philosophy lies not in the gradual homogenization of thought into one all embracing logic, but rather in developing a multitude of systems, all of which should offer us ever more diverse and complex ways of understanding our existence.

In undertaking the task of finding a coherent pattern of political thought in a thinker like Schelling, it is essential that we allow him to speak for himself, choosing for the moment to avoid the echo chamber of received readings. A strategy to facilitate this is, in a move of intellectual judo, to apply Schelling’s interpretive strategies to his *own* work, thereby helping us to disclose and understand him on his own terms. He offers us our interpretive method in his account of how he reads Kant, when he writes early on

.....it has never been my intention to copy what Kant had written nor [my claim] to know what Kant *had* properly intended with his philosophy, but merely [to write] what, in *my* view, he *had* to have intended if his philosophy was to prove internally cohesive. (I/1, 375) ⁱⁱⁱ

Applying this interpretative technique to his own work, our task is as clear as it is challenging: to discover what Schelling ‘had to have intended if his philosophy’ is ‘to prove internally cohesive.’

To do this, we take another principle of Schelling's hermeneutic, namely his position that the key to understanding a thinker is to find that one central idea – a “fundamental thought” - that serves as the axis around which his or her work revolves. In his reading of Leibniz, for example (I/1, 457)^{iv}, the “center of gravity” Schelling finds is a universal archetype of systematic unity whose integrative form permeates the *multiplicity* of Leibniz' systems, no matter how different or contradictory they appear, providing a shared (*gemeinschaftlicher*) coherence that unites all of them into what Schelling calls a larger organic system of human knowing. Like the initial conditions of a self-organizing system, this initial archetype reveals itself, in accordance with the principle of self-similarity, in every subsequent phase of this system's evolution. This account of how to read Leibniz's chaos of contradictions provides us with a clear articulation of Schelling's own perception of what unites all systems of philosophy in every age, including his own; a position that implies that this particular account of the epicenter of philosophy must also hold as the focal point of his own system.

As I argue elsewhere, and as the title of this talk makes clear, Schelling's fundamental idea articulates an organic form of philosophy. Relevant use of this form occurs in its application to Kant's antinomy of freedom. In his *Naturrecht* of 1796, he demands that the moral law and its “causality of freedom *reveals itself* through physical causality” (I, 248). According to Kant, the best we can do in understanding this problem is to maintain his dual plane theory of the noumenal and the phenomenal in a type of Compatibilism, organized according to his disjunctive form of reasoning – a position that of course, as every dualism must, leaves unexplained how these two orders of causality are unified and interact. Schelling picks up where Kant left off and draws the inference demanded by Kant's own architectonic, employing the Kantian resources of this disjunctive form to the central actor in this drama, namely the form of phenomena which we

are: The an sich we can know directly, namely ourselves, a living organism. For what is the logical form Kant uses to articulate the organic dynamic? The disjunctive, the same form he uses to resolve freedom's antinomy. The point of union between these two orders of causality, the transition point Schelling writes "must unite within itself autonomy and heteronomy" (248) - that is, from the standpoint of the object it must be capable of being determined by laws of nature, yet according to its Principle it must be autonomous, i.e. incapable of being determined through any law of nature (248). There must be a form of causality that unites both of these in a phenomena that is both relative and absolute, obeys the laws of nature and yet is also in principle incapable of ever being exhaustively accounted for. Schelling's unifying order of causality? He writes: "This causality is *life*. – Life is autonomy in appearance, is the schema of freedom, to the degree that it reveals itself in Nature." (I/1 249). Freedom is not, as it is for Kant, an otherworldly transcendent force, but is instead the immanent power that organizes out reality the entirety of all creation. Just to drive home the paradox of freedom, Schelling concludes: "I am therefore necessarily a *living* being." (I 1 249).

With this Schelling serves notice that the first predicate of philosophy must speak to the system of self-organizing nature that is our world. Before self, reflection, clarity or distinctness, there is "the infinite striving for self-organization" (I/1, 386), wherein nature, as both cause and effect of itself, reveals the form of reciprocal causality indicative of freedom. This "eternal" and thus "indestructible" "form of organization" (I/1, 387) drives the entire continuum of nature, from seemingly inert matter to the most robust self-organizing system of the human spirit, and its most intricate creation, philosophy. This organic form provides Schelling with the conceptual model required to tackle the perennial problem of how to grasp the interconnectedness and unity of our existence and world, as well as all the ensuing dualisms that follow from this underlying

oneness. The unifying power of organic form is precisely what Schelling means to express through the term *Identity*, whose relational structure is incapable of being reduced to the linear mechanics of logic, since it exhibits the same property of reciprocity indicative of the dynamic feedback that structures life's capacity for self-organization.

Due to the non-linear dynamic of self-organization, Schelling's fundamental idea of the organic entails that life so conceived "manifests the appearance of freedom," no matter how faint and seemingly chaotic (I/5, 527). Life, understood as being "that carries the ground of its *Daseyns* in itself," since "it is cause and effect of itself" (I/2, 40), not only introduces an irreducibly chaotic element into the linear frame of mechanical reasoning, but it also calls into question the limits of such a mechanistic explanatory framework. In Schelling's hands, a mechanistic environment ruled exclusively by necessity distinguishes itself from an organic system in its reactive obedience to initial conditions and its incapacity for the progressive creation of new and original actions. Like a well-tuned engine that never misfires, a mechanism executes an action "in a circle, in which every cycle of actions there is only one action (always repeated)" (I/1, 470). While such a mechanism may break down, it can never break out of its predetermined, necessary course. It is also incapable of accounting for the fact of what Schelling calls the "individualization of matter" (I/2, 520), which he holds to be indicative of the "dynamic evolution" of nature. "Even within the same type" he writes, "nature knows of a certain unmistakable freedom, which maintains a certain leeway for differentiation ... so that no *individuum* is ever absolutely equal to another" (I/10, 378). By positing this low-level freedom in nature as a type of chaotic force that propels the evolutionary differentiation of life, Schelling generates the conceptual resources required to integrate freedom and necessity into a unified account of nature, in which the noumenal and phenomenal intertwine in an organic, and thus

chaotic, evolving cycle of self-differentiation. A point which is fundamental to his understanding of the State as the organism of freedom, in that the state must be seen as a natural occurrence whose fundamental reality and features are not the **result** of an intentional deliberative process *a la* the Social Contract Theory, but rather serves as the means for the end of the further differentiation of and individualization of people, specifically, the further development of personality. Nature's goal of the "dynamic evolution" of ever more differentiated systems reaches through from the basest matter to organisms per se to human creativity and institutions – including the subject of our inquiry today, politics and its institution, the state.

[INDIVIDUALIZATION]

To pursue this point, let us consider how Schelling uses this organic form to, through the disjunctive logic of Wechselwirkung und Gemainshaft, to unify and set into a productive oppositional relation the dualities that define both consciousness in general and metaphysics in particular. For example, and perhaps most importantly, due to his conviction that the most pressing questions of the human spirit can only be adequately addressed if one accepts the reality of the absolute as divine and sacred, - and by this I mean in this context capable of supplying a binding power along the lines of the **reverence** Kant speaks of in regards to the moral law - , he refuses the enlightenment's attempt to disassociate reason and philosophy from faith and religion, and instead works throughout his career to integrate religion and philosophy in such a way that they would no longer have to apologize for each other. Against the prevailing spirit of modernity, he sought to bring logos and mythos back to the negotiating table, working to keep their negative and positive tasks united in an uneasy alliance of belief and doubt. From the *Alteste System fragmente der deutschen Idealismus* to his final lectures in Berlin, he called for the creation of a new "philosophical religion" that would, amongst other things, cultivate a new

understanding of the divine which, for example in order to account for its responsibility as a source of evil, must be conceptualized as a part of the ongoing process of creation's "dynamic evolution" (I/3, 61). Such a religion of the future would be the next phase of development in humanity's response to the natural reality of the sacred, which, like the State, is a natural force and fact of existence, whose reality for Schelling is made manifest in the institutions and beliefs of the world's religious traditions, which, as the historical record shows, have always been a defining characteristic of human existence. As source and sustaining force of creation, Schelling's conception of the divine embraces our spiritual nature as well as our physical nature in that our world and its institutions must, from this perspective, be seen as what he calls the Theogonic process, which is the ongoing self-revelation of that which is most sacred, namely the source and sustaining power of all life. Accordingly, the State and Religion must, following the metaphors of this organic form, be seen as life-sustaining sources, vital organs as it were, of our continued well-being and further development.

With this we arrive at the point I find so interesting and relevant to today's – and last night's discussions – namely the essential and irreducible organic relation between the state and religion. To capture the full force of Schelling's position, consider the following quote from his Berlin Lectures, in which he makes clear, in very blunt terms, how elemental the state and religion are to human existence, writing:

Human existence in general moves between only two poles - the state and religion.

Voltaire was right when he said: that person is a coward who doesn't dare consider these two poles of life. (XIII, 179)

Cowards are those who acknowledge the reality and the power of religion, but refuse to seriously engage this reality and power, particularly as it relates to the political. Worse yet are those

thinkers who deny religion's presence in the political process überhaupt - [a dangerous position Ernst Bloch addressed in his criticisms of the German (enlightened, secular) left during the Zwischen-kriegs-zeit which, in its inability to understand and thus deal with the reality and chthonic power of religion and myth, failed to take seriously the potential power of National Socialists.] Schelling reserves his most intense criticism for the "even more disadvantageous" type of thinkers who imagine that, as in the French Revolution, one could "make a state and a religion" from scratch, detached from any and all "historical reality" (XIII 179). As an organic product, "new" religions or states are always built on the traditions of older ones, just as new rings of a tree grow out of older ones. "We just cannot extract ourselves from the age in which we find ourselves" (XIII 179). As nature has it, we are born to parents not of our choosing just as we are born to an age, to a state, to a belief system, not of our choosing. The attempt to deny – to repress – these facts only leads to a future destructive or neurotic outbreak.

The relationship between state and religion, Schelling continues, is so intimate, "that neither one without the other can have its true effect" (XIII 179). As *Wechselbegriffe*, the productive power of religion and the state are mutually dependent, with religion providing the esoteric vision that consecrates and guides its exoteric articulation in the state. As organic, the healthiest, most productive state is one that harmoniously blends the 'esoteric' and the 'exoteric' into a unity. In the Athens of Ancient Greece – which he significantly calls "the freest state in history" (XIII 179) -- the Eleusian Mysteries provided the esoteric "sanctification" (*Weihe*) of the ideals and values that united and inspired its citizens. In Schelling's eyes, without this sanctification the Athenian state would not have functioned as effectively as it did, and nor would it have had the historical impact it continues to enjoy. The determinative element in this sanctifying legitimation is its *utopian affirmation* of a more perfect future which, as Schelling

emphasizes quite forcefully, “may never enter into the present” (XIII 179). He extends this point to Christianity, continuing “thus in the Christian mysteries another kingdom is shown that levels out all inequalities of the present situation, without however, ever to enter into this, because it is the kingdom that in eternity reigns, and therefore has no place in time” (XIII 179). The tense of this sanctifying vision is fundamentally of the future, for as an ideal vision it must by definition remain before us, both in order that it continuously lead us to strive for what is better, but also so that it protect us from the destructive delusion that we could somehow realize heaven on earth, which he explicitly describes as an “(apocalyptic) Schwärmerei” (XII 552).

Schelling builds his suggestive sketch of a new, future - and thus not yet existing - philosophical religion on the past traditions of Athens and Christianity, advancing a radical vision of a philosophical religion in which “freedom [becomes] our highest value, our deity” (XIII 256). In this statement, in which freedom becomes not only a highest value, but a deity – here I would like to suggest we find a way of understanding how Schelling envisioned the intimate relationship between religion and state as it should be – a relation of both united through freedom.

Uniting past and present in a developmental understanding of divinity, the determinative tense of this deity of freedom is not the past, or even the present, but the future, and thus it is a god that should be – *das Seinsollende*. Understood as such, as a coming god, Schelling can argue that this deity has in fact been the historically engaged power that animates our shared religious past, present and, he contends, future. The magisterial sweep of his *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation* makes the case that far from ever suffering a death of god, divinity maintains its future tense by always begetting new gods: Kronus begets Zeus as Brahman begets Buddha as Yahweh begets Jesus. Jesus as Logos in turn begets Reason, the new god of modernity and the

Enlightenment. In the hands of Kant reason itself in its practical interest births freedom. Yet as Kronus feared being killed by his progeny and thus attempted to kill them, Reason too fears freedom, since the individualizing thrust of freedom subverts reason's order of the universal and the necessary. Kronus devours his young, whereas Kant restricts freedom to the noumenal through his third antinomy. Schelling in turn employs the disjunctive logic of the third antinomy to articulate how organic life itself reveals the natural schema of a causality of freedom, in that its self-organizing capacity [as both cause and effect of itself] demonstrates a self-determination indicative of freedom.

Transposing this organic form of self-organization to the abstract proposition of absolute Identity – of the 'I=I' – we encounter an inexorable absolute that reason's regressive analysis cannot reduce to a series of causes, since an absolute magnitude or identity can only determine itself, thereby providing a sublime expression of the new god of freedom, since only freedom can determine itself. And it is only freedom that can liberate human consciousness from those obstacles that restrain individuals from becoming fully free persons – especially in terms of liberating oneself from religions that do not allow for a free relation to divinity. In his *Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation* Schelling demonstrates the evolutionary process whereby human consciousness has successively, in ever increasing degrees of freedom, liberated itself from the constraints of myth and, yes, revelation. Thus for Schelling this Theogonic process includes the revealed religion of Christianity, through which he notes “the free religion is only transmitted, not immediately posited” (XI, 258). An important point to remember: for Schelling Christianity is only the most recent bearer of divinity – freedom – whose natural task it is to pass on, this divinity to a new phase of humanity's response to this divinity, which will overcome Christianity as Christianity overcame Paganism. “Consciousness,” Schelling continues, “must be again

become free from revelation in order to progress” to this new philosophical and thus free religion, since “revelation also becomes a source of involuntary knowledge” (XI, 259).

And here we double back to the State, since Schelling makes it clear that this free religion, this philosophical religion, even though it must be the esoteric source and telos of the state, it can never, due its form as a free religion, become a “state religion,” but must instead become a “religion of the human race” (XIV, 328), that is “to be ... only sought with freedom and found with freedom” and “can only be fully realized as philosophical [religion]” (XI, 255).

Dethroning the divinization of reason, Schelling’s vision of a deity of freedom provides the esoteric source for an organic conception of the state which, as the exoteric manifestation of freedom, serves *only* as the condition for freedom’s progressive realization. Just as “nature knows of a certain unmistakable freedom, which maintains a certain leeway for differentiation” (X, 378) and the “individualization of matter” (I/2, 520), so too differentiation and individualization occurs within humanity. This process of nature’s dynamic evolution occurs through the human institution of the state whose cause however, just as in the theogonic process, is not the result of some deliberative process or social contract, but is instead rooted deep in “a buried fact of the unfathomable past” (XI, 550). The state is thus for Schelling the “precondition” and “foundation of all human life and of all further development,” and as “foundation” it is “not [the] end, but rather [the] ... starting point for the higher goals of all geistigen Lebens” (XI 550).

Clearly following Kant, Schelling held that only an inner revolution will bring about a lasting and meaningful development in society. The economy of violence necessarily employed by a state in the political arena is a bludgeon, a blunt force that seeks to effect change thru trauma and is ultimately counterproductive. The state and politics only of peripheral concern for Schelling, who believed that philosophy's "proper task is the Ausbildung of Wissenschaft in

religion" and to bring "religion to more powerful, more lively knowledge, which is only possible through Wissenschaft" – a task that offers "the only hope of a coming regeneration" of society [In a letter rejecting a too overtly political article by Eschenmeyer in 1813 (Plitt 3 bd. s.304)].

In closing, I would like to bring this discussion back to a theme we broached briefly last night, namely: if we accept Schelling's position the State can only thrive when it is justified by the sanction of religion, what are we to do in our current situation, be it a European Union whose only sanction appears to be economic – and thus perhaps the antithesis of the religious – or be it if we find ourselves in the United states living amongst the Christian Fundamentalist – which some now call the American Taliban - who want to elevate the Bible over our constitution?

Is Schelling right when he argues that, since we can never remove ourselves from the natural, historical process we find ourselves in, that we must integrate our past religious traditions – somehow – in our current consciousness? Or more pointedly, that we cannot move forward as a society - in the robust and productive sense Schelling spoke of in the drive of nature for further individualization – without a vision of a future, a normative horizon, whose utopian power should sanctify our current efforts to transform our current political and social conditions?

As Manfred has pointed out repeatedly, “every religious worldview - whether Christian or not - protects the supreme moral convictions that ground the consensus of its members, through the act of *sanction*.”^v *Sanctio*, however, not in the instrumental sense of a Rorty-like pragmatic hypothesis that we could change tomorrow, but in the profoundly numinous sense of a normative principle worth dying for – what Frank calls "an absolute value" and “justification” that can motivate and inspire people to risk their own self-interest for a higher cause.^{vi}

Can the deliberative legislator, the archetypal technocrat in Brussels, saves us? Or do we require a new Dionysius?

ⁱ Manfred Baum for example, has recently called for "the story of his philosophical development [...to] be rewritten." Manfred Baum, "The Beginnings of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy – Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel*, ed. Sally Sedgwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199.

ⁱⁱ G.W.F. Hegel, *Briefe von und an Hegel*. Ed. K. Hegel (Leipzig: Dunker & Humboldt, 1887) vol. I, 138.

ⁱⁱⁱ Paul Ricœur, *De l'interprétation; essai sur Freud* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965), 35.

^{iv} As Schelling often does, he paraphrases here a passage taken from Leibniz, but as provided by Jacobi: in the latter's *Über die Lehre des Spinoza* (1789) he cites a passage taken from Leibniz's third letter to M. Remond de Montmort, found in his *Recueil de div. Pieces par des Maizeaux* (Tom. II, p. 417, *Op. omnia*, T. II, P.I, p. 79). The frequency with which Schelling makes use of ideas found in Jacobi's works has been employed by some as evidence testifying for Schelling's dependence on Jacobi. But as the case here shows, Schelling is using Jacobi to get at Leibniz, whose work in Latin he was more familiar with than his letters in French. Sandkaulen-Bock sticks with the Jacobi factor, and advances Jacobi's *Spinozabriefe* (1785) as the determinative factor in shaping Schelling's first thoughts, setting him on a course that, while close to Fichte's, was destined to become more concerned with correcting the lifeless determinism of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Because an unconditioned principle cannot be a thing (since it is "unbedingt"), Spinoza's absolute must be life itself, which, like Jacobi's intuition of a personal God, we grasp through an intellectual intuition that is itself the manifestation of the productive activity of the 'self.' See Sandkaulen-Bock, *Ausgang vom Unbedingten*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990) 39ff. Annemarie Pieper defends a similar position in her "'Ethik à la Spinoza' – Historisch-systematische Überlegungen zu einem Vorhaben des jungen Schelling," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 31, 1977: 545-564.

^v Manfred Frank, *kalttes Herz unendliche Fahrt* (Suhrkamp: 1989) 53. (Hereafter *KH*)

^{vi} Manfred Frank, *Conditio moderna* (Reclam: 1993) 94. (Hereafter *KM*). Of course in speaking of normative principles worth dying for we immediately constellate both the worst and the best of humanity.