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The Late Schelling's Speculative Theology of the World Soul

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article traite du concept de l'âme de l'univers dans la pensée philosophique de Schelling à ses débuts et à une période plus tardive. Dans un premier temps, il s'agit d'une notion centrale en rapport avec une conception de l'auto-organisation de la nature, qui semble disparaître plus tard. Schelling lui-même prend ses distances à l'égard de son panthéisme antérieur et il en vient à concevoir la nature comme une réalité déchue, éloignée du divin et dé-spiritualisée. Le trinitarisme subordinationnaliste de Schelling le conduit toutefois à concevoir la Trinité comme impliquée dans la Chute et progressivement engagée dans la rédemption. Celle de la nature est alors perçue comme la prérogative particulière de l'Esprit Saint, troisième personne de la Trinité, dont le caractère personnel émerge à travers l'histoire de la nature en tant que son principe d'organisation et sa finalité. La nature dans son ensemble, selon la vision paulinienne caractéristique de la pensée tardive de Schelling, est tendue vers la révélation du Christ comme Seigneur de l'univers. L'âme de l'univers n'est pas purement et simplement identifiable à l'Esprit Saint. Dans l'étape ultime de la pensée de Schelling, l'âme de l'univers n'existe pas encore véritablement. Mais elle existera à la fin, quand elle s'actualisera non pas simplement comme esprit de la nature mais encore comme Esprit de Dieu.

SPIRIT OF NATURE/SPIRIT OF GOD: The Late Schelling's Speculative Theology of the World Soul

SEAN MCGRATH

For Iain Hamilton Grant

The History of the World Soul

The concept of the world soul has been aptly described as a central Schellingian notion.¹ The ancient idea, common to Platonism and Stoicism, was of interest to Schelling from the 1795 *Timaeus* commentary to his 1841 lectures on the Philosophy of Revelation.² Nevertheless, Schelling produced neither a historical nor a systematic study of the concept. Schelling's 1798 book, *Von der Weltseele*,³ deploys the concept as an ancient metaphor for the principle of the self-organization of nature. While the text is rich with the scientific lore of the time and characteristically daring speculative explanatory leaps, there is no detailed discussion of the metaphysics of the world soul in this text, nor any elaboration of what kind of creation we would need to explain such a thing. It was not until the Philosophy of Revelation, when Schelling freed himself from the limitations of his early immanentism, that the sketch of a theory of the world soul began to emerge. Maintaining his early idea, that nature is that which organizes itself, and the crucial insight of *Naturphilosophie*, that the principle of nature's self-organization is immanent to its material conditions, the late Schelling suggests that the world soul is, if not yet divine, in process of divinization. The universe according to the late Schelling is the theatre of the triadic individuation of the triune God. The divinization or personalization of the world soul is not only the culmination of natural and human history, it is above all the final act of God's self-revelation. This work is the special prerogative of the third person of the Trinity. As the Father confirms his patrimony and comes to be Father in a new sense in the first creation, and

1. See HEDLEY 2022, p. 296: "The *spiritus rector* of the revival of the *anima mundi* is Schelling." The references are to the bibliography at the end of the current article.

2. See SCHELLING 2008 and 2020 respectively.

3. Friedrich W.J. SCHELLING, *Sämtliche Werke* (hereafter SW), vol. 2, pp. 345-583.

the Son confirms his filiation in the Christic redemption of the second, fallen creation, the Spirit becomes fully God in the cosmological perfection of matter in the third and final creation.

From the beginning to the end of his career, Schelling opposed mechanism, which would deny self-organization in general, as he opposed vitalism, which would attribute self-organization to life alone. The master signifier for nature as such, Schelling says against both mechanists and vitalists, is *organism* with the anorganic not an exception but a means towards self-organization (SW 2, p. 349). In this way, Kant's reduction of organic causality to a regulative principle for thinking nature is corrected. Kant has the concept of teleology right: the organism is cause and effect of itself, a whole composed of co-working parts, all of which presuppose the whole of which they are parts and at the same time which constitute the whole or produce it through their collaboration.⁴ But Kant has just about everything else wrong. Teleology cannot be merely a regulative principle for thinking life; it must be constitutive or ontogenetic. The organism manifestly is not organized by my thinking it; rather "it organizes itself"⁵. Most important, teleology should not be reduced to a local event within a broader mechanical order. When it is so reduced, it itself becomes inexplicable. Nature as such should be thought of as self-organizing – that at least is the hypothesis of *Naturphilosophie*.

This correction of Kant has not only the advantage of making better sense of local self-organization (the animal or the plant). It has the added bonus of no longer leaving the nature that thinks nature (ourselves) unexplained. In an organic, self-organized cosmos, we are ourselves part of the whole, indeed, we have a special role to play in natural history, namely the role of bringing the whole to thought. At the same time, the world in some unimaginable sense precedes us. This special role of the human knower is an emergent property of a much older, non-human world. "The world has among other things an auto epistemic structure," as Hoglebe puts it in his classic study of Schellingian logic, *Predication and Genesis*.⁶ This materialist swerve in Schellingian thought is in no way a rejection of the central insight of transcendental philosophy, the insight into transcendental synthesis. A whole is never as such sensibly given: it is constructed in thought as we make sense of the parts of the organism. The thought of the whole is inevitably circular, with the knowledge of the organism enriched with each interpretive cycle: we know the whole only insofar as we understand its parts as *for the sake of* the whole, and we know its parts only insofar as we presuppose the whole of *for the sake of which* they are parts. This circular "for the sake of which" is not inscribed into the matter of the thing. The quality of being "for the sake of which" is not sensibly given

4. KANT 2001, § 64.

5. SCHELLING 1987, p. 190.

6. SCHELLING 2024, p. 46.

but inferred and inference does not occur without cognition. Wholes as such only exist in thinking. Nevertheless transcendental synthesis does not imply that the organism needs me to organize it. But it does in a sense need me to be complete for only in my thinking does the implicit whole which organizes its various parts come into explicit, cognitive existence. The organism does not know itself as organized; it does not know what it in fact is. The intrinsically knowable whole only becomes known through the cognitive animal, that is, through us. The hummingbird outside my window, has an agenda of its own even if it has no knowledge of it. Still, it depends on me to recognize the principle that makes of its many moving parts a coherent, functioning life. By scaling this argument from the local to the macro, from the individual form of life to the organic whole of the universe itself we arrive at the now well-known Schellingian conclusion: nature achieves one of its ends in human consciousness by producing the means of its own self-cognition.

This was the young Schelling's motivating idea when he argued against Fichte that nature is not some spiritless means towards the achievement of the self-consciousness of the transcendental subject. Nature is more than the object for the I; it, too, is spirit in its own way. Much of what Fichte says of the transcendental subject – that it posits itself, that is, makes itself manifest through othering itself, etc., can, and indeed, must be said of nature. Nature posits itself by positing what is not itself: unconditioned nature produces conditioned nature (natural things), and the tension between these two, the one unconditioned, the other conditioned, creates the dynamism of evolutionary history. All the movement, transformations, growth and decay, in short, all of evolution, is grounded, according to the young Schelling, in an invisible, spiritual drive of unconditioned nature toward self-organization and manifestation. But because an infinitely productive drive can never become manifest in a product, can never be satisfied in a determinate and finite thing – *das Unbedingte kann kein Ding sein* – nature contests the individual and mercilessly sacrifices her children.⁷ With each new stage of evolution, unconditioned nature corrects itself and starts anew, condemning whole eras of living species to extinction. Whether, we, thinking nature (the nature that thinks), are also to be superseded remains an open question. If the past is any evidence, we most certainly will. But we also have reason to assume that that which succeeds us will have at least as much cognitive ability to bring nature herself to self-knowledge as we ourselves, and indeed, very likely much more.

It is in this context of transforming what Kant regarded as the merely regulative idea of natural teleology into a constitutive idea that the young

7. "From this moment forward [after sexual reproduction], since the joint product is secured, nature will abandon the individual, will cease to be active in it, or rather it will then begin to exercise an antithetical effect upon it; from now on the individual will be a limit to its activity, which nature labours to destroy" (SCHELLING 2004, 41).

Schelling first took up the ancient theme of the world soul. The world soul is the principle that organizes the one life of nature – it is the form of the body of the universe directed towards one end, of being made manifest in all that comes to be and passes away. It is spirit without consciousness. For if deep nature is describable as a subject, it is an unconscious subject. It does not reflect, deliberate, or morally judge and act. Rather, it moves, blindly and necessarily, but not arbitrarily, towards self-manifestation. Think of the unconscious intelligence at work in the most common sight in a tropical rainforest: a colony of leaf-cutter ants making their inexorable way from the tree where they harvest the leaves the colony needs back to the hive. The members of the colony – which number in the millions – all possess clearly demarcated roles. Some are workers, indefatigably carrying leaf cuttings many times their size in long processions, which, were they scaled would be equivalent to a train several kilometers long. On the leaves themselves, smaller ants cling, the cleaners, whose singular task it is to prepare the leaves for the nest. Others are not part of the train but scout ahead, the soldiers, whose duty it is to find fresh supplies. All are constantly mobilized in the highly specialized tasks necessary to the gathering of a mass of a certain type of organic material. The leaf cuttings are not themselves consumed. They are farmed. As they compost they produce a fungus that feeds the colony.

Schelling's early concept of self-organization comes to a high water mark in the already mentioned 1798 treatise. The title of the book itself tells us what Schelling is aiming at: *Von der Weltseele, eine Hypothese der höheren Physik. Zur Erklärung des allgemeinen Organismus*. The world soul is not only a metaphor but also a scientific hypothesis of the "higher physics," i.e., *Naturphilosophie*. The hypothesis is to be abductively demonstrated, proven to be plausible by its power to explain certain facts, namely "the universal organism," or self-organization of nature. The increasing levels of complexity in natural history (*die Stufenfolge*, e.g., mineral, vegetal, animal) can best be explained as the evolution of a single organism, organizing itself (*die allmähliche Entwicklung einer unter derselben Organization* (SW 2, p. 348). Mechanism cannot be denied; anorganic causality is as regular as local, organic self-organization. But mechanism cannot be primal; it is the negation of organism and thus presupposes it (SW 2, p. 349). Contra vitalism, Schelling argues that self-organization cannot be reduced to a principle of the organic alone: anorganic and organic nature are *both* products of the self-organizing principle, the universal soul of nature (*die gemeinschaftliche Seele der Natur*) (SW 2, p. 570).

It is important to note how deeply a-theological and immanentist Schelling's thought is at this early point in his career. Eschewing traditional Platonic theological interpretations of the world soul, which would read Plato's *Timaeus* as requiring a spiritual intervention into matter in order to animate it, Schelling

insists that the principle of self-organization emerges from matter itself: "The principle of life did not come into organic nature from outside (for example by infusion – a lifeless but widespread idea), but the reverse, organic matter has itself formed this principle" (SW 2, p. 567-568). As we shall see, the late Schelling shall rethink this issue. He will come to a much clearer understanding of the relationship of self-organizing nature to the transcendent God who is its architect.

There is little need to review in detail the history of the concept of the world soul here as Douglas Hedley has recently done so with admirable thoroughness.⁸ The tradition begins with Plato's claim that the cosmos is a living organism (*Timaeus* 30c). Plotinus, working with a more nuanced, Aristotelian, notion of soul than Plato, soul as the first act of a body equipped for life (*De Anima*, 412a27), speaks of the world soul as the immediate emanation of the third hypostases, *psyche*, which actualizes the matter of the universe as a single, living being (*Enneads*, IV, 3). In a Christian context, the association of the world soul with the Holy Spirit was typical of the second-century Greek Fathers such as Justin Martyr.⁹ The position, however, was anathematized by the Roman Catholic Church in 1141 when Abelard and the School of Chartres attempted revive it.¹⁰ The concept more or less disappears in the late Middle Ages until it returns with a vengeance in the Renaissance: in Ficino, Paracelsus, Bruno, and the Cambridge Platonists, in particular. It then becomes a cherished theme in Romanticism (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Emerson). In sum, the world soul appears to have been on the metaphysical and theological agenda wherever the being of nature was at issue, that is, wherever nature was thematized as more than a shadow appearance of divine form, having its own internal principle of self-movement and unity. But the question of the relationship of the world soul to the Trinity was not revisited until Schelling broached the topic in his *Philosophy of Revelation*.

In 1798, Schelling was intent on explaining the world without the creator God.¹¹ The world soul makes a passing appearance in Schelling's middle works¹² and then retreats until it re-emerges dramatically transfigured at the end of Schelling's career, in the *Philosophy of Revelation*. Schelling will not simply return to the School of Chartres' identification of world soul with Holy Spirit. He identifies the two figures but with a crucial temporal distinction: the world soul *will be* the Holy Spirit but it is not yet. First, nature itself will have to be transfigured into the "new heavens and new earth" promised us

8. HEDLEY 2022.

9. BELL 2007, pp. 43-44.

10. HEDLEY 2022, p. 292.

11. For my view of the two phases of Schelling's career, a first, immanentist and a-theological phase which has nature as its theme, and a second, speculative-theological phase which begins with the 1809 *Freedom Essay*, see McGRATH 2021, pp. 31-38).

12. SCHELLING 2000, p. 72.

in the New Testament, “a world filled with God’s righteousness” (2 Peter 13). Then the Spirit will recapitulate natural and human history and God shall be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

Non-Dialectical Trinitarianism

Before we reconstruct this late Schellingian transfiguration of the world soul, it is necessary to situate Schelling’s Trinitarian theology in the history of Christianity. The late Schelling walks a razor’s edge with orthodoxy. His heterodox swerves are never arbitrary: he has a set of hermeneutical principles, which he believes ought to guide all philosophical interpretations of scripture. Foremost among them is his understanding of personality, whether human or divine, as, pace Hegel, not a dialectical return to oneself through another, but a self-mediation that first makes one capable of free relations to others. A person, on this line, is not one who stands in a necessary relation to another person but one who has overcome an internal necessity. Personal relations follow the law of love outlined in the programmatic *Freedom Essay*: “This is the secret of love, that it links such things of which each could exist for itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other.”¹³ There must be at least the possibility of separate existence if there are to be personal relations, even or perhaps especially among the persons of the Trinity.

Schelling’s alternative to Hegel on this point inaugurated a minority personalist tradition, which was eclipsed in the 20th century by the more popular, Hegelian dialogical personalist tradition. The Hegelian tradition includes Buber, Husserl, and Gadamer, among many others. The Schellingian minority tradition of non-dialectical personalism includes figures such as Kierkegaard, Berdyaev, Heidegger, and Levinas. The chief difference between the two traditions concerns the logical status of the relation of the self to other selves. Is the social relation necessary or contingent? Both traditions insist that an I needs a Thou to become fully personal. But where the Hegelian tradition holds such relations to be necessary to a freely acting person, meaning that there is no unmediated self-relation, the non-dialectical personalist tradition argues that the I-Thou relation is contingent on an irreducibly individual act of good will. Otherwise put, a person can refuse relation and still remain themselves. To be sure, they become evil in such refusal, but of their own volition. As I have written of Schelling’s non-dialectical personalism elsewhere I will not develop it further here.¹⁴

It follows that if Schelling stands opposed to any one trend in the Trinitarian tradition, it is modalism, which renders the relations between the three

13. SCHELLING 2006, p. 409.

14. See MCGRATH 2022; 2021, pp. 95-101.

divine persons (or “modes of being,” as they are described) functionalist, logical, and in Schellingian terms, impersonal or unfree. Given the ubiquity of modalism in modern theology (both Rahner and Barth rightly pass for modalists), Schelling's non-dialectical Trinitarianism makes him an outlier, to say the least. He is willing to risk the unity of the divine for the sake of affirming genuinely personal, that is, free relations among the divine persons.

But let us start at the beginning. Aroused from unconsciousness before the creation of the world by Sophia, God's anima who is equiprimordial with the Godhead, and seeing in the mirror of her wisdom the vision of what might be, God overcame the blind act of being that preceded him and became God.¹⁵ He transformed the *actus purus*, the necessity that precedes all personal existence, divine or otherwise, reducing it from actuality to potency, that is, he de-actualized blind being and appropriated it and made it his own. At the same time and in the same act, God stepped back from infinite actuality and retreated into potency so that another might be actualized outside him. The divine overcoming of necessity and free contraction of being is the archetype for all personalization, divine or human. One could describe it as a proto-Freudian overcoming of original narcissism. In salvation history, each of the three divine persons pass through a similar process of suffering the crisis of possibly turning away from love, overcoming the necessity of this inwardization drive, and self-contracting so that others might be.

Non-dialectical personalism explains to a great degree Schelling's re-actualization of ante-Nicene subordinationism.¹⁶ When Schelling argues that the personality of the Son is *not* actualized by the Father – the incarnation of the Son in the process of the Son's self-actualization takes place in a being “outside” God¹⁷ – his point is not to follow Arius and denigrate the Son or demote him to a lesser rank of divinity. Rather his point is quite the opposite: to affirm of the Son the genuine, personal freedom of God, which is the freedom to be or not to be who he is. The Father *begets* the Son, he does not determine him.¹⁸ He releases the Son into the freedom of becoming himself. As Origen also argued, the Son need not obey, just as the Father need not beget, which means the Son need not be, just as the Father need not be.¹⁹ God can be and in some sense always already was without the Son. And the Son possesses the possibility, which he renounces on the cross, of claiming divinity for himself (Phil 2:5-11). The Father's begetting of the Son does not consist in an actualization of a second divine person but rather in the possibilization

15. This the late Schelling's theogony which endeavours to explain how the free God emerges from the blind necessity of infinite being. See SCHELLING 2020, pp. 124-154). On Boehme's sophiology, which is Schelling's model here, see McGRATH 2012, ch. 2; O'REGAN 2002.

16. O'REGAN 2011.

17. SCHELLING 2020, pp. 280-295.

18. SCHELLING 2020, pp. 170-172.

19. WILLIAMS 1987, p. 97.

of one who, should he be actual, will be actual by his own deed. The Son is begotten as a free possibility for self-actualization otherwise than the Father. The Father does not double himself in the Son (the logical relation of modalism); he others himself by absenting himself from actuality, contracting his being so that another might be in his place.

Now there is no other expression than to beget for an activity, in which what had Being previously takes away something that belonged to it, i.e., posits it as an other from itself, yet not as actual but in a way that is compelled to actualize itself unrelentingly. The second potency is thus the begotten potency.²⁰

A word on this “compulsion” is necessary, lest we confuse Schelling with Hegel and falsely assume necessary or logical relations among the three divine persons. The second potency is marked by necessity; it is the being that must be. But even here, at the most fundamental ontological level, necessity remains contingent for Schelling. The second potency must be the potency for necessary being but nothing makes its necessity necessary. If it is, it will be that which must be (*das Sein Müssende*), but it need not be. The second potency is compelled to actualize itself but it need not do so. If it does not do so, it will not exist, even as a potency. The second potency only is insofar as it must be. Schelling’s Trinitarian theology explains the constitution of the Trinity as a collaboration among three free and independent centres of personality.²¹ “It is absolutely necessary for the understanding of Christianity – the condition *sine qua non* of perceiving its true meaning – that we comprehend this cutting-off of the Son from the Father, this being in his own form and hence in complete freedom and independence of the Father (SW 14, p. 39). The Father begets the Son as the potency for actuality, but he does not determine him as actual, he determines him as compelled to self-actualize. Because he is thus freed to be himself, the Son is free to obey or not. “When the Son speaks of his obedience to the Father, he ascribes to himself, as least as a possibility, a will of his own, an independent being. The incarnation is presented as a voluntary degradation that he could have eluded.”²²

The Depersonalization of the Trinity in the Fall of First Creation

Schelling follows the Church Fathers in conceiving the Fall of Man²³ as a cosmological event. However, he goes further than any of them and narrates the

20. SCHELLING 2020, pp. 170-171.

21. Schelling most resembles the “social Trinitarianism” of Jürgen Moltmann. See MOLTMAN 1993.

22. SCHELLING 2020, p. 180; translation altered.

23. In flagrant violation of trends I will use the gendered substantive, “Man,” capitalized, rather than the gender neutral alternatives (“human being,” “humanity”) because for Schelling the Fall is the result of the free act of a singular corporate being whose counterpart is Christ. We

Fall as also an event in the life of God. God suffers its effects precisely because in the perfection of love God has made Godself genuinely vulnerable to an other, a real other, whom he has released into its own unprethinkable freedom to act as they will to act. In the Fall, the distance between the divine persons is pushed to an extreme, to the point of shattering the unity of the divine.²⁴ The Son is lost to the Father in time and the Spirit is lost to the Father and the Son in nature, but the separation is for the sake of a freely achieved unity of being in the Spirit.

To reconstruct this part of the late Schelling's theo-drama, we must first be clear that there are three creations in Schelling's theory of history (as there were three ages of the world in his middle period): a first creation, beginning with the birth of God in the Sophia-mediated subordination of blind being (ground) to triune being, which passes through the divine processions of the Son and the Spirit (fully personalized before the creation of nature) and which culminates in the creation of paradise; a second creation, beginning with the usurpation of God by Man, the Fall of being and the loss of the divine unity as the three persons are de-realized, becoming separate from one another in a fragmented world; and a third creation when the Spirit will restore the unity of being and return the world to the Father through the Son, and God will be all in all. The recapitulated unity of third creation will not simply be a return to the unity of first creation: something new will have occurred: the absolute personalization of the Trinity.²⁵

To be absolutely clear on a point that is liable of misinterpretation, God does not need creation and its history to be Trinity. The divine persons are eternally actualized in God's original theogony in the first creation, in the eternal overcoming of blind being by personal being. This is a crucial, hard-

deal here with what the Kabbalah names Adam Kadmon and not with a universal or a species. If it helps, Adam Kadmon before the Fall is neither male nor female, but the original androgyny. Sexuation only occurs with the Fall. See SCHOLEM 1974.

24. After the Fall, the Son is exile and becomes "extra-divine because of being posited into a Being independent of the Father" (SCHELLING 2020, p. 181) – he becomes literally the Son of Man, no longer the Son of the Father, wandering homeless and unrecognized through the mythological age until he appears in history as Jesus. He is the Son of Man because his post-Lapsarian role is the result of his being taken hostage by Man: "By intruding in this way between the Father and the Son, by seizing the potency that begets the Son (the paternal potency), Man thereby separated the Son from the Father, and took power over him who indwelt the Father and had completely realized himself in him. Just so Man usurped the Spirit. But this could not happen without the divine withdrawing; the persons became for Man and in relation to the principle reawakened in human consciousness mere potencies" (SW 13, p. 367).

25. "Scripture thus distinguishes ages of revelation and posits a distant future when God will be all in all [*Alles in Allem*], that is, when God will be fully realized [*verwirklicht*]." (SCHELLING 2006, p. 66). See also SCHELLING 1994, p. 243: "Sin is not eternal, and neither are its consequences. The end of the last age is the complete and perfect realization – God's final becoming human, in which the infinite becomes finite without compromising its infinity. Then God will be all in all, and pantheism, true." (translation altered)

won point for Schelling, who struggled with historical immanentism for the better part of his career.²⁶ In 1810, he wrote that God begins unconscious and only becomes fully God in creation.²⁷ In 1831 he corrects himself: God begins free. He does not need creation to be God.²⁸ Just so the Trinity is eternally achieved prior to creation²⁹. And yet, surrendered as God is to an emergent rather than a determined order, the Trinity too has its own path to walk into a contingent future. And because it is a genuine, unprethinkable future, the Trinity has something to gain or lose thereby.

This path includes a painful, undesired and unintended obstruction of goodness and reversal of development. The divine personalities already achieved in eternity are undone by the disobedience of Man. The three persons return to what they were before the individuation of God. The difference is that prior to God's individuation, the potencies were potential persons; after the individuation and as a result of the fall the potencies are things that should not be, de-realized or de-personalized persons.

When man reawakens the principle meant to rest in him, in the overcoming of which the higher potencies realized and freed themselves as personalities, when he reawakens this principle, the higher potencies are as a consequence again de-realized, posited as mere potencies, and indeed now no longer as divine or relatively extra-divine, but as actually extra-divine. (SW 13, p. 368).

With the Fall of Man, second creation and the time of our world begins. Human consciousness deteriorates, and with it, divinity itself. This surprising detail underscores an important claim in the late Schelling's speculative theology to which we have already alluded: God does not hold himself aloof from the fate of his creation but makes himself vulnerable to it. The notion of God's vulnerability could be described as the fundamental thought which inspires Schelling's turn to the positive. Already in the *Freedom Essay*, he writes, "Without the notion of a suffering God, which is common to all ancient mysteries and spiritual religions, history as such would be incomprehensible."³⁰ The appropriation of the Kabbalistic *zimzum* in *The Ages of the World* is motivated by the same thought: God limits Godself in creation, God renders Godself vulnerable to another: the first act of creation is negative or self-limit-

26. I mean by "historical immanentism" the thesis common to the early Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel, that God needs the world to be God: God is immanent in history and only exists in and through it. See McGRATH 2012, ch. 1. The position violates the freedom and transcendence of God. Indeed, it is more or less atheism, as the late Schelling came to see.

27. SCHELLING 1994, pp. 206-207.

28. SCHELLING 2010, pp. 89, 125.

29. SCHELLING 2020, pp. 170-172.

30. SCHELLING 2006, p. 66.

ing.³¹ The thought comes to fullest expression in the Philosophy of Revelation where it could be described as the leitmotif of the whole narrative:

One can already see a divine folly in the fact that God should get involved with a world at all since he could have rejoiced in eternal self-sufficiency in the mere contemplation of the world made possible by him. But the weakness of God can be seen especially in his weakness for man. But in this weakness, he is stronger than man. His heart is big enough to be capable of anything. In creation, he shows only the power of his spirit, in redemption the greatness of his heart. This is what I meant when I said that the revelation – or the deed which is the content of the revelation – was his most personal act. (SW 14, p. 26)

It should come as no surprise then that the Fall for Schelling is not just the Fall of Man, it is also the Fall of God. With the Fall, something happens to the Trinity. The persons become de-personalized and fall out of relation to one another. The second creation, however, is only the middle part of a three-part drama which ends with recapitulation (*anakephalaiōsis*) and a new unity in a third creation, the dawning of the new heavens and the new earth prophesied in the New Testament (2 Peter 13; Revelation 21; Romans 8). Or as Schelling puts it laconically: “Father, Son, and Spirit are actualized in the overcome B.”³²

The re-personalization of the Trinity constitutes history as such: it is the whole story, the only story, “the secret” or “mystery” of creation, which Paul says was hidden through the ages and revealed in the Christ event (Eph 1:9–10). Schelling points out that the distinction between the eternal Trinitarian relations and the history of the Trinity in the fallen order more or less corresponds to the traditional distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity³³: in themselves, the three remain divine persons; for us they become once again potencies. Fallen human consciousness is bereft of their presence.³⁴

31. SCHELLING 2000, p. 16. On Schelling and the Kabbalah, which he did not read directly because as a gentile he was not permitted to, but which he was instructed in by the Frankfurt Kabbalist Franz Molitor, see FRANKS 2015.

32. SCHELLING 2020, p. 172.

33. The immanent Trinity in traditional theology is the Trinity in itself; the economic Trinity is the Trinity in relation to us, to history.

34. The de-personalization is relative to the human, Schelling points out: “Not that it [the second potency] could cease to be a personality in itself, but in the human consciousness and opposite the same activated principle, that ought not to be [B, the awakened ground], the second will again behave like a potency” (SCHELLING 2020, pp. 179–180). This passage is difficult to interpret but it seems to mean that while the divine persons remain in themselves personal they become in creation impersonal forces. “Man has seized the fatherly, begetting power in that prehistoric act. But to be lord over the activated principle is not given to him; he succumbs under its rule, which now takes on, against his consciousness, the attribute it had before the [first] Creation” (SCHELLING 2020, p. 179). There is a return here to an antecedent state, which, when it was first actual was not evil. But in its untimely reactualization after it should have become potency to a new actuality, it is evil. Indeed, this is the form of evil itself, as Schelling defined it in his *Freedom Essay*: evil is the ground refusing to ground, the antecedent refusing its anterior and subordinate position to its consequent but rather willing to be the consequent, which means refusing to be what it is, the antecedent. See SCHELLING 2006, pp. 33–36.

As in the theogony of the gods in the philosophy of mythology, we should not interpret this claim subjectively, as though the persons only *appear* to consciousness as potencies. For Schelling, consciousness is the inside of nature and so an alteration in consciousness is a change in the real. Most importantly for understanding the place of the world soul in the late Schelling, the Fall depersonalizes nature by depriving it of genuine divinity. The world soul, we might speculate, only comes to be with the Fall and the loss of the personal divine immanence in nature characteristic of first creation. Nothing about this is merely subjective. Natural history is preceded by unnatural history. As with the fate of the Son, we see that this experience of consciousness corresponds to a real experience of God: as the Son loses and is lost to the Father in the Fall, so does the Spirit lose nature and become lost to it. While the exiled Son roams the post-Lapsarian age as Dionysus, the Spirit deteriorates into an impersonal, cosmic principle. But just as the anonymous Son has a positive impact on history, inspiring the pagans and the prophets in true religion, so too does the de-personalized Spirit have its role: indeed it is the cause of life itself. As a cosmic, demiurgic potency, the Spirit quickens matter into life at the beginning of second creation and becomes the telos of an unconsciously unfolding material order.

Schelling's doctrine of the suffering Trinity is perhaps his most Gnostic swerve and we would do well to pay attention here. If orthodoxy must reject Schelling, it is because he sides with Valentinian Gnosticism in rendering God vulnerable to evil, and creation in its actuality, a thing that strictly speaking should not be because God has not willed it. In Schelling's defence, we could argue that higher than divine impassibility is divine vulnerability. The highest perfection is love and love lays its life down for its friends (Jn 15:13). God is vulnerable to his creature because he makes himself so. Still, if the fundamental claim of Gnosticism is the finitude of God, it cannot be denied that Schelling finds more truth in Gnosticism than the Fathers generally allowed. Valentinian Gnosticism, however, finitizes God by demonizing matter, and this latter move is not only one that Schelling does not make, it is alien to his life-long reverence for nature. Valentinus agreed with Paul that all of nature was fallen and groaning as in the pangs of childbirth (Rom 8:22). He added a mytho-poetic theodicy which explained why things that should not be in fact were. The demiurge, the son of the fallen Sophia, aped the creator of the *plèrôma* and made something God never intended, and as a consequence, the good souls of human beings became trapped in unredeemable bodies.³⁵

35. See WILLIAMS (1992). What the Christians regarded as innocent – non-human, material nature – the Gnostics vilified. And what the Gnostics regarded as innocent – the human soul (at least those of the elect) – the Christians vilified. No idiot demiurge was needed for the Christians to explain the things that should not be but a new anthropology which elevated human power

Schelling calls second creation that which should not be (*das Nicht-sein-sollende*).³⁶ But he does not make material creation evil in itself, nor does he hope to see it utterly destroyed. He is quite clear that nature is *of* God, even if it is manifestly not God and no longer what it was. Fallen nature is ultimately the work of Man, whom Schelling describes in terms reminiscent of the Gnostic demiurge. Man, intended to be the centre point of the original theophany, becomes Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice, self-willfully copying the creator and venturing something of which he is not capable. He awakens the ground of creation, as the Father himself did in creating the world, but he is not equal to mastering it. Instead of making something beautiful – his intention – Man makes ugly the beauty that God had already made. Man was called to preserve the balance among the potencies which makes Trinitarian relations possible. But Man willed otherwise: “The very law that tells him not to move B, the ground of the Creation, reveals to him the possibility to upheave this ground of Creation again.”³⁷ In the call lay the temptation, the seductive possibility, anxiety-making as Kierkegaard would later add, to try and do what only God can do. Succumbing to this temptation Man reactualizes the ground to see if he, like God, can wrestle it into submission himself: “Man wanted to do what God did, set the potencies into tension to rule them as lord.”³⁸ But Man is not God, and the re-actualized ground reverses the order of things, de-divinizing being and returning the three divine persons to potency, rendering them impotent at least with respect to creation. The second creation ensues, riven with pain and death, a fallen world, which is wholly the work of Man, not God, and something God condemns. “The one Man who lives on in all of us can rightly be called the author of this world – a world that searches for its final goal in vain and brings about the wrong time, one that never ends but emerges continuously.”³⁹

The Recapitulation of Nature

It is hard not to hear echoes of Schelling's early *Naturphilosophie* in the last sentence. Let us assume that this resonance is no accident, that by “a world that searches for its final goal in vain” and “a wrong time, one that never ends but emerges continuously,” Schelling renames the endless becoming of *natura naturata*. The nature that unfolds endless in space and time is driven to embody the infinite drive of invisible nature (*natura naturans*). Failing

to the point at which we could become responsible, not only for our own disfigurement but for the death and suffering ubiquitous in creation.

36. SCHELLING 2020, p. 177.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. SCHELLING 2020, pp. 178-179.

repeatedly to so, nature succeeds only in producing the *Stufenfolge* of natural history as each individual pair of animals sexuates and capitulates to its offspring, its externalized other, and each species, having failed to be the final one intended, gives rise to its successor and would be better. This evolution of endless life is celebrated in the *First Outline of a System of Nature Philosophy* of 1799 as the only adequate spatio-temporal manifestation of the infinite.⁴⁰ In the 1841 *Philosophy of Revelation* the same process is described as an evolution of endless death. We see here the very point of the turn to the positive, the axis of Schelling I and II. An infinitely becoming nature which was close enough to divinity to be mistaken for it by Schelling's first followers is now re-evaluated and found repellant. It is now described as a process that never seems to reach its end but stagnates in an impersonal and homogenous time.⁴¹

The late Schelling says that the Father is the efficient cause of creation, the Son the formal cause, and the Spirit the final cause, that for the sake of which all has occurred (SW 12, p. 112).⁴² It was for the sake of the Spirit that God contracted his being and created something other than himself. It was for the sake of the Spirit that God allowed creation to Fall. It was for the sake of the Spirit that God "gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). All of this is done so that the Spirit might become a living, divine personality, overcoming necessity and glorified in the final creation. The dynamism, self-organization and infinite productivity of nature, which Schelling elaborated throughout his *naturphilosophische* phase, is not left out of the history of the triune God. On the contrary, it is the Spirit that drives nature forward into ever-new expansion and contraction, production and destruction. The following passage, from the first book of the *Philosophy of Revelation*, is key to understanding the late Schelling's pneumatology:

The third potency is the drive, the impulse of all movement. As such it appears in the order of later, yet higher mediations. The prophets, according to the Apostle Peter, were driven by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the one who impels individual men to divine birth, that is to the restoration [*Wiederherstellung*] of divine being. The Spirit is not the immediate agent, but rather always the mediator [*das Durchwirkende*], and we recognize it as such in nature. The effect, the trace of this third potency can be seen in all that appears in nature as fitted to a purpose

40. SCHELLING 2004.

41. Here as throughout the *Philosophy of Revelation*, Paul is Schelling's guide. See Romans 8:18-22: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

42. B, the reversed potency, is the material cause.

[als *Zweckmäßigkeit*], as driven toward a determinate end, a determinate natural goal. The Spirit is also to be considered from two sides. In the tension or during the [creative] process, it is the demiurgic potency, like the Son; in the recapitulation, however, it is a divine personality. From the Spirit as cosmic potency comes forth all, which in nature itself, in the midst of necessity, presages freedom or a principle of free will – the animal can do what it wants – not only in the freedom which appears to play in the movement and behaviour of animals, for example, in bird song, which manifestly allows for variations, but also in the freedom at play in the unfathomable multiplicity of colours, forms, and shapes of creation, that is, in that which proceeds according to desire, predisposition, and with caprice and mood. (SW 13, pp. 334-335)

Nota bene, the “demiurgic” or “cosmic potency” is an *antecedent* form of the Holy Spirit, the third person in a pre-personal phase of its development. Schelling does not simply identify the world soul and the Holy Spirit. The world soul is antecedent, the Spirit consequent, and “the law of the ground” applies.⁴³ The world soul only has actuality in serving as the potentiality for the emergence of the Spirit, just as the emergent Spirit only has actuality because it is grounded in the world soul. The question of the relation of these two forms of the Spirit, pre-personal and personal, is decisive for understanding the later Schelling's re-evaluation of nature. What was previously apotheosized as “unconditioned” (nature in itself) is now described as incomplete, but perhaps not in the end tragic in as much as its history is not yet finished. The contrast between Schelling I and Schelling II here is striking. But the change in view was not sudden.

The unpublished dialogue, *Clara*, which some date as early as 1810, contains Schelling's darkest musings on the apparent futility of the present form of nature. The transience of spring, the inevitability of age and death, the fragility of youth and beauty fill the female protagonist of the dialogue (Clara) with a melancholic sense that nature is under a curse. In an unforgettable phrase, she declares, “the whole earth is one great ruin.”⁴⁴

Indeed [Clara says], if another power within me didn't balance out this horror of nature, I would die from the thought of this eternal night and retreat of light, of this eternally struggling beingness that never actively is. Only the thought of God makes our inner being light and peaceful again.⁴⁵

It is not only that nature is manifestly not divine and lacks the fullness of being. Nature is diseased, “suffering from a hidden poison that she would like

43. See SW 11, 375: “The antecedent has its actuality in the consequent in respect of which it is accordingly mere potency.” Or in Grant's words, “what is antecedent has its actuality *qua* antecedent in its having consequents” (Grant 2013, 9). The law of ground, which Schelling says is equiprimordial with the law of identity (Schelling 2006, 17), means that wherever there is order, there is always an antecedent which is wholly other than the consequent, and vice versa.

44. SCHELLING 2002, p. 25.

45. SCHELLING 2002, p. 19.

to overcome or reject, but cannot."⁴⁶ It is this infection, this spiritual malaise, which Clara sees as the root problem and the reason why "nothing lasts"; nature is in the grip of an "inner necessity that in the end destroys everything."⁴⁷

To put Schelling II back into dialogue with Schelling I: the older philosopher comes to understand that invisible nature is only relatively absolute, and hence in itself doomed to fail. However, in the course of history, it becomes the matter, ground, or antecedent of the self-personalizing triune God. Just as the Son presupposes a demiurgic cosmic potency out of which he develops as a free, divine person, so too does the Spirit require a natural ground, a created substrate from which it emerges as a time-tested and individuated divine person. Prior to the recapitulation, the world soul is not the Holy Spirit. But in the end, the world soul will have become the Holy Spirit, or better, the Holy Spirit will assume the being of the world soul, as the Son assumed human flesh. This will not be a second hypostatic union, a second incarnation, but rather a completion of the Son's incarnation. What began in Christ must continue, and expand to the compass of the earth, unto the union of divinity with all of nature.

In the dispute between naturalists and transcendentalists, the former denying a distinct role for human freedom in creation, and the latter making the distinction into a separation of the animal and the human, Schelling would not have any part. Nature is the ground of freedom and, although hierarchically ordered, continuous. The Spirit moves the appetites of the lower animals as much as it inspires prophets. It brings variety and singularity into forms even as it testifies, in the inspired human heart, to the divinity of the Son. One Spirit moves through all things, human and non-human, evolving in deep time, from the pre-personal and unconscious to the personal and consciously individuated, to its final end in the divinely personal and super-conscious. A form of proto-freedom appears in the tendency toward variety, multiplicity and individuality in non-human natural history. But the fullness of freedom, moral freedom, appears only in human nature. And divine freedom as such will only be fully realized, actualized, and embodied, with the whole of nature as its body, at the end, when humans, now sundered into self-maximizing units of competition and warring nations, will have, through the Spirit achieved perfect community. The non-human will also be included, in some still unclear sense. It has to be included because it remains the ground of Spirit forever.

The new age of the world inaugurated by the Christ event is also a new age of nature, which now begins to move with secret unconscious stirrings of divine personality. When the Son is glorified in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Christ, the Spirit begins its re-ascent from the impersonal cosmological drive in nature to his glorification as the fully-realized God. This

46. SCHELLING 2002, p. 21.

47. *Ibid.*

Joachimite Trinitarian history of revelation is a later addition to Schelling's final system but it repeats in many ways the main thesis of the *Weltalter* project: what we call history is not an arbitrary succession of events, nor a story of the random evolution of human civilization from primitive origins. Rather, history is the dramatic individuation of God, and nature is caught up in it. Only by the three divine potencies becoming unequal to each other in the second creation, by creating distance, and with it, tension between one another, only thus does eternity give way to time, as the three become actual as three independent wills seeking and finding each other. While it is the Son that performs the act of kenosis that reverses sin, the renunciation of the possibility of positing himself as God, and thus it is the Son who affirms the eternal sovereignty of the Father, it is the Spirit who carries forward the consequence of the act, gathering all of creation through a humanity now internally united, compelled by nothing but the interior conviction of each individual, gathering it all around the Son, and through the universal acknowledgement of his lordship of being, returning creation to the Father in a final act which Schelling, drawing from Paul and Irenaeus calls, recapitulation (*die Wiederherstellung*), "the summing up" or "gathering up" (*anakephalaiôsasthai*) of all things in Christ, in short, the third and final creation.

* * *

In conclusion, let us consider how Schelling's last system itself comes full circle and recapitulates his first, the *Naturphilosophie* of 1797-1800. For the term *Wiederherstellung* also appears in the early *Naturphilosophie*. There it refers to the moment of synthesis after analysis or the restoration of a state of rest after a state of agitation. Noteworthy, the early Schelling speaks of this restoration as the work of the third or synthesizing potency.⁴⁸ In the Philosophy of Mythology and Revelation, the term *Widerherstellung* comes to mean the production of a new state of unity, not a return to *homeostasis*.⁴⁹ Here we note again the profound influence of Paul on the final form of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*: supernatural *Wiedersherstellung* is not just the restoration of a previous state of cosmological balance, but the recapitulation of all that has been which produces something new and unprecedented out of conflict and loss, the emergence of an identity that has never before existed.⁵⁰ The later

48. See SW 3, p. 163: "But in the organism, duplicity is negated. It is in equilibrium with itself and there is rest in it. But there is supposed to be activity in it, which can only be produced by the constant restoration of duplicity. But this constant restoration (*Wiederherstellung*) can itself only be effected by a third, and therefore the cause [of restoration] will appear active in the organism only under the condition of triplicity."

49. See SW 11, p. 388; SW 13, pp. 10-11, SW 14, pp. 9-10, 82.

50. Cf. Ephesians 1:10, IRENAEUS, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.16.6.

Schelling explicitly identifies recapitulation with the “new creation” promised us in 2 Peter 3 and Revelation 21 (SW 14, p. 10).

For, according to the unanimous testimony of the New Testament, this is the real gain of the incarnation and death of Jesus, that he thereby acquired the Holy Spirit for us, that is, he recapitulates [*wiederherstellt*] the divine birth in three persons, which was interrupted by the Fall; for this is what is meant when it is said that we become God’s children again. Because of this recapitulation [*Wiederherstellung*] of the whole divine being in man, the apostles were instructed to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (SW 14, pp. 181-182).

Against a theological tradition always in danger of Gnostic acosmism, Schelling insists on including the whole of the history of nature in the Pauline recapitulation. Not just the history of Man, but the history of the animals, the history of the planet, the history of the elements – none of this can be left out for all of this is the domain of the third person. There will be nothing static about the recapitulation: it will be the full enlivening of the cosmos. However impossible to imagine – and it is impossible to imagine – the Schellingian *eschaton* should be associated with dynamism, embodiment, sensuality, as well as the play of personal relations, above all with the systole and diastole of love, love become victorious over death and irrepressibly alive.

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SUMMARY

This paper tracks the concept of the world soul in Schelling's early and late philosophy. The concept is central to Schelling's early philosophy of self-organizing nature. It seems to disappear in his later period, in which Schelling distances himself from his earlier pantheism and comes to think of nature as fallen, distanced from the divine, and de-spiritualized. However, Schelling's subordinationist Trinitarianism conceives of the Trinity as implicated in the Fall and processively included in the redemption. The redemption of nature is the special prerogative of the Third Person, the Holy Spirit, who personalizes himself by emerging through natural history as nature's principle of organization and goal. All of nature, in the late Schelling's Pauline vision, is directed toward the revelation of the Christ as the Lord of the Universe. The world soul is not simply identical to the Holy Spirit. For the later Schelling, the world soul does not yet exist. But it will in the end, when it will be actualized as not only the spirit of nature but also the Spirit of God.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article traite du concept de l'âme de l'univers dans la pensée philosophique de Schelling à ses débuts et à une période plus tardive. Dans un premier temps, il s'agit d'une notion centrale en rapport avec une conception de l'auto-organisation de la nature, qui semble disparaître plus tard. Schelling lui-même prend ses distances à l'égard de son panthéisme antérieur et il en vient à concevoir la nature comme une réalité déchue, éloignée du divin et dé-spiritualisée. Le trinitarisme subordinationniste de Schelling le conduit toutefois à concevoir la Trinité comme impliquée dans la Chute et progressivement engagée dans la rédemption. Celle de la nature est alors perçue comme la prérogative particulière de l'Esprit Saint, troisième personne de la Trinité, dont le caractère personnel émerge à travers l'histoire de la nature en tant que son principe d'organisation et sa finalité. La nature dans son ensemble, selon la vision paulinienne caractéristique de la pensée tardive de Schelling, est tendue vers la révélation du Christ comme Seigneur de l'univers. L'âme de l'univers n'est pas purement et simplement identifiable à l'Esprit Saint. Dans l'étape ultime de la pensée de Schelling, l'âme de l'univers n'existe pas encore véritablement. Mais elle existera à la fin, quand elle s'actualisera non pas simplement comme esprit de la nature mais encore comme Esprit de Dieu.