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*Review of Revolution, Idealism, and Human Freedom:  
Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel and the Crisis of Early  
German Idealism* by Franz Gabriel Nauen

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Franz Gabriel Nauen, *Revolution, Idealism, and Human Freedom: Schelling, Hölderlin, and Hegel and the Crisis of Early German Idealism*. (Nijhoff, the Hague, 1971).

The 1790's were a time of upheaval, and every thinker in Europe was moved by the events of France, by the measure of fear or of promise they offered. In Germany the reaction to the political tumult was intense; the seeds of French radicalism found a ground nurtured by idealistic moral ideology, on the one hand, and actual political backwardness on the other. The cultural result of the completed Kantian philosophy was—as Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* testify—a preoccupation with the notion of freedom and its

paradoxical invisibility. If one could not touch upon freedom to violate it, neither could one grasp it in order to nurture, establish or institutionalize it. This proved a quandary not for theoretical or philosophic reason alone. History had taken up the Kantian problematic, and as the progress of the Revolution through 'the Terror' indicated, made its solution most urgent.

Such was the tenor of the world for, or the pressure of the *Zeitgeist* upon, the comrades of the Tübingen Stift. What is distinctive about the philosophies of Schelling, Hegel and Hölderlin in their political germ, contends Nauen, is the attempt they make to regionalize their political solutions, to adapt the cosmic sweep and violent tempo of the French upheaval to the more pastoral Schwabian situation, and to the considerable (and in many ways surprising) liberal tradition long established in Württemberg politics.

Certainly every attentive reader of Hegel or Schelling or Hölderlin desires to look back into those Tübingen years, to discern the reactions of these remarkable comrades to the French events, and to trace out the lines of influence from their youthful political enthusiasm to their mature views. Even more he would like to be able to delineate the influences of these three disparate spirits upon one other. All these things Nauen attempts to do, but the brevity of his study, its chronological limitations—it follows Schelling only to 1796, Hegel and Hölderlin only to 1800—and its dryness frustrate the emergence of a sharp picture of "The Tübingen 3."

The basis for Nauen's study, and the one area where he makes a solid contribution, is the politics of the Duchy of Württemberg. A semi-republican spirit had long existed there, where both the power and enlightenment ideology of the Catholic Duke had been counterbalanced by the Estates, a body representative of the middle class and dominated by the Pietist clergy. By 1790 the Enlightenment, championed by the court and the new ducal academy, the Karlsschule, had made deep inroads upon the Church. When the Duke and the Estates again came into conflict, orthodox theology was no longer a moving force and the traditionally liberal and socially-minded classes represented by the Estates found themselves without ideology and without spokesmen. Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling were acutely

aware of this vacuum; the project of the Tübingen years, common to all three of them, was the fabrication of a new ideology—the new "mythology of freedom" of Schelling's 1796 *Systemprogramme*.

Nauen depicts with some success the radicalizing atmosphere of the Tübingen seminary. Traditionally the channel not only to a clerical career, but to positions in the state bureaucracy and to eventual political power in the Estates, the seminary was quite alive to the significance of the events in France. And within the very seminary walls themselves there was the conflict, in the minds of faculty and students alike, between orthodox Pietist theology and Enlightenment rationalism. It was an environment which made it not only possible, but rather likely, that a young Hegel, rebelling against the tacit compromises of his professors with both 'old theology' and 'old politics', would pen such documents critical of Christianity as we have extant in the *Early Writings*.

Nauen does not meet comparable success in tracing out the specific development of Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel and making intelligible the connecting links (if any) between the days of active radicalism, that is, active support of Girondist or Jacobin politics abroad and of pro-French parties at home, to their philosophical systems. He is most concrete and convincing in his sketch of the moral-political dynamic inside Schelling's early writings. His treatment of Hölderlin indicates the poet's social and political concerns, but utterly fails to communicate the depth and intensity of his concern; one can see very little of Heidegger's poet and primal-speaker in this grey and prosey ideologue Nauen presents. And his treatment of Hegel, an attempt to read between the lines and establish a thread of thematic continuity among the *Early Writings*, only seems to establish that the struggle to give a political meaning to abstract, interior Kantian freedom was *not* the impulse that turns Hegel to systematic philosophy in 1800. Here, as in his treatment of Schelling on intellectual intuition and the readability of freedom, Nauen commits the mistake of regarding political interest and commitment as the only dynamic in his philosophers' development, disregarding completely logical, methodological, and epistemological concerns. Freedom engaged the passionate interest of Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel not as a prosaic moral fact, nor even just as a moral-political possibility; it

draws them also because of its invisibility, its transcendence, its hints of absoluteness. The possibility of freedom sets not only the political problem, but the problem of method (or of dialectical or holistic knowledge), and it is the latter problem that motivates the philosopher's concern for the philosophical system.

Mr. Nauen's monograph is on a topic of intrinsic interest to any scholar of Hegel or Schelling or Hölderlin. It is most disappointing, then, that the author hides the wealth of his research in footnotes and proceeds in large scale generalities. In a study whose aim is to clarify the relations of Hölderlin, Schelling and Hegel, it is certainly pertinent to quote from their letters to one another. Concreteness, vividness, wealth of detail, these are Hegelian virtues which a study of this nature ought not to lack.