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# Book Review of *Schelling: Geschichte, System, Freiheit*, by Werner Marx

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Werner Marx, Schelling: *Geschichte, System, Freiheit* (Alber-Broschur, Freiburg-MUnchen, 1977) 156pp.

The tendency in recent Schelling studies has been toward massive, all-encompassing interpretations, e.g. Harold Holz' *Spekulation und Faktizität*, J.-P. Marquet's *Liberté et existence*, and M. Veto's *Le Fondement selon Schelling*. Werner Marx, in the three essays collected here, chooses to focus on two important turning points in Schelling's speculative career — the *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800 and the 1809 *Essay on Human Freedom*. The narrow focus is motivated not by historical interest alone, but by Marx's assessment of the situation of philosophy today. Says Marx,

It would in fact be false to deny that the traditional foundation upon which Schelling's project rests can no longer basically correspond to our contemporary historical consciousness and to the altered vision of man and the world brought about by the domination of technology. But what foundation, then, is authoritative for our present-day thought, both for philosophy and science and for our everyday actions? Is such a foundation yet conceived? It is, I contend, the particular fate of our generation to live between the tradition and the beginning of a new foundation, to live in a time in which the old categories of knowledge and the old standards of ethical action weaken and disappear, in an age in which as yet no new foundation has appeared (pp. 13-14).

Marx looks back to Schelling as a philosopher who thinks from, and consequently stands as a representative of, the tradition. These studies embody a nostalgia for the tradition, for Marx thinks that — whether our task be theory of history or practical philosophy or the attempt to provide any speculative or scientific account with systematic foundation — we necessarily lack the certainty Schelling's thought possessed, i.e. we lack the secure foundation of an Absolute and find the theological presuppositions that helped us make sense of history and human action and provided the closure and finality of systematic knowledge all discredited.

The first essay, "Grundbegriffe der Geschichtesauffassung bei Schelling und Habermas," contrasts the explicit teleological, indeed theological, foundations of the theory of history found in Schelling's 1800 *System* with the problematic, and apparently unfounded, teleology of Habermas' vision of history in *Erkenntnis und Interesse*.

Schelling sees history as an objectification of the will, indeed its highest grade of objectification, where its rationality is no longer obscured by the arbitrary nature of individuals' acts. "History," he says, "is there only where one ideal is realized through infinitely many variations, and realized so that not only the particular but indeed the totality come into congruence with it (3:588)." This one ideal is the concept of a world-order wherein freedom, the essence of self-consciousness, would be realized in a thoroughly law-like manner. Schelling calls this world-state a "second and higher nature," meaning by 'nature' something like a mechanica order, wherein things are

governed by necessity and not by caprice. Since Schelling contends that freedom can be maintained and enhanced only when supported by such an order of necessity, we can see that his notion of history as a tendency moving to bring human events into a universal world-order brings the concepts of freedom and necessity into an absolute contradiction. And yet there is the demand that these be made one and harmonized.

Marx observes that the task of solving the contradiction between human freedom and natural necessity pervades Schelling's thought in all stages and is its great systematic theme. In 1800 he solves the freedom-necessity problem in the following way: Since the whole of the (philosophically reconstructed) world of the Self stems from a dialectical interplay of unconscious productivity and conscious or reflective appropriation thereof, the togetherness of unconscious act and conscious recognition must be established definitively in a 'highest synthesis,' which of course overreaches ordinary consciousness. This synthesis binds together freedom and necessity and integrates the will of individual agents into the world-historical teleological process. The 1800 *System*, setting out to think the ground of the law-like character of freedom and the freedom or spontaneity of the lawfulness of nature from both sides, thus arrives at their necessary identity, and with the postulation of this identity takes on a metaphysical or indeed theological character. Marx notes that for religion such a complete synthesis is nothing other than God and that, therefore, Schelling's theory of history has explicitly theological presuppositions, whether or not Schelling in 1800 would state them in the language religion traditionally uses.

Marx is hardly critical of this teleological and theological foundation for the System, but he is critical of the work's failure to harmonize the postulated absolute synthesis of freedom and necessity with any meaningful sense of *human* freedom. As Marx rightly sees, Schelling's system is vitiated by an irreconcilable contradiction. The system is supposed to be founded on freedom and as a whole to be nothing other than the outworking of freedom as productivity and as coming-to-consciousness, yet it ends up a system of blind necessity, wherein the rationality of human agency is in fact denied. It is not until the 1809 freedom essay that Schelling attempts to think through in a

more profound and reflective way a possible harmonization of human freedom and rationality with the freedom/necessity of the Absolute.

Marx then turns his attention to Jürgen Habermas' view of history. Habermas' theory is expounded from a Marxian basis, where in history is seen as the process of human self-production. Self-production,' however, is given a radically non-Marxian interpretation, i.e. an epistemological and transcendental one, in that Habermas contends that work indeed transforms nature for human use, but that the crucial element in such transformation is reflection or the power of reason. Man not only makes himself through praxis, but through rational praxis. Marx comments that with this granting of an independent status to reflection as the motor of history's evolution toward the 'emancipated society,' Habermas' theory becomes explicitly teleological. The problem, though, is to ground or in some sense explain this teleological orientation of reflection toward human emancipation, for the theological presuppositions that undergird a theory of history such as Schelling's have been totally discredited.

Marx observes that Habermas' notion of reflection is deeply confused. (1) The concept of reflection does not sort well with the basic Marxian view of history Habermas espouses. Reflection is plausibly located within class-consciousness, but Habermas neglects to explain the possible transition between work on the material basis to the emergence of reflective consciousness. (2) Habermas borrows his concept of reflection from Hegel, but the kind of reflection he has in mind lacks the sceptical or negatively self-related character of Hegelian consciousness. (3) What dimension of human spirituality or transcendence that Habermas introduces into his theory by turning to Hegel for the concept of reflection is vitiated by his turning to Freudian psychotherapy for a working-model of reflection. Taking psychotherapy as the model of the rational dialogue that can go on within a society, Habermas actually limits the role of human reflection, and certainly of human freedom. Marx argues that there is something deeply contradictory in Habermas' adoption of reflection as the motor of historical development, something deeply ungrounded in a teleological view of history that has cut itself off from theological presuppositions. Marx finds in Habermas, "the dilemma of a theory of history that indeed implicitly pursues its pattern in a teleological

manner while wishing to overcome teleology, yet being unable to set it aside" (p.62).

In his second essay, "Aufgabe und Methode der Philosophie in Schelling's System des transzendente Idealismus und in Hegel's Phänomenologie des Geistes," Marx compares the systematic standpoints of Schelling in 1800 and of Hegel in 1807. His supposition is that the two works are parallel and differ only in the way they seek to solve a commonly held vision of the task of philosophy, enunciated by Hegel in the *Differzschrift* as "die Aufhebung der Entzweiung" — the resolution of dichotomies common to ordinary consciousness and traditional philosophy alike, oppositions between subjectivity and objectivity, between reason and ethical activity, between intelligence and nature. Marx seeks to vindicate Schelling's central system-concept, intellectual intuition, and to show that, despite the polemics Hegel introduced into the *Phenomenology's* 'Preface,' it is as adequate a system-principle as Hegel's own reflection.

Marx begins by noting that despite differences in detail and vigorous polemical discussions, Fichte, the young Schelling and Hegel are in agreement: Philosophy as Wissenschaft is made possible by, and founded upon, that dimension of freedom found in finite self-consciousness. That freedom is represented in the System precisely by the notion of intellectual intuition, for therein Schelling claimed, "the beginning and end of this philosophy is freedom, the absolute indemonstrable, that which can be proven only through itself" (3:376). Packed into the concept of intellectual intuition, claims Marx, are the notions of freedom, productivity, spontaneity, and self certification.

Marx acutely observes that behind the concept of intellectual intuition in the 1800 System is Schelling's conviction that there is a pre-reflexive, spontaneous and productive side of reason — in other words, reason is operative in, and constitutive of, the world at a level that is beyond the comprehension of ordinary consciousness. Accordingly the System calls all pre-conscious and constitutive acts 'acts of intuition' and organizes its systematization of human knowledge as a progressive coming-to-consciousness of these preconscious productive acts. Schelling conceives intellectual intuition as simultaneously the power to posit itself and the power to limit itself.

It is an identity of opposites, but always a synthetic identity; within self-intuition (and self constitution) there is always a duplicity, always a uniting of opposites in the unity of intuition.

Marx then asks whether intellectual intuition can provide the necessity requisite for system, whether there is a logical impossibility of moving from the Absolute to the finite. He denies these contentions, for at the heart of the concept of intellectual intuition is the idea of a spontaneous productivity, one which, though its workings be pre-conscious, heads teleologically toward a fully conscious self-recognition. The System portrays the hierarchy of the acts constitutive of reason as a history of self-consciousness and brilliantly solves the problem of the basic duplicity of the Self in making the final stage aesthetic intuition, the perfect union of unconscious activity and conscious recognition.

It is Marx's defense of the importance of *aesthetic* intuition as the final and definitive form of intellectual intuition that distinguishes his interpretation of the System and allows him to oppose it to an Hegelian position. To maintain this interpretation, Marx must dismiss certain quasi-Hegelian misunderstandings of the System, some of which Schelling himself authored in his 1827 Lectures on the *History of Modern Philosophy*. He argues (1) that though Schelling distinguishes the philosophizing "we" from the self "for-itself," the distinction is not the motor of the system's development, but merely a rhetorical device. (2) Unlike the Phenomenology, the System is neither a *Bildungsgeschichte* nor a recollection of itself on the part of self-consciousness nor is it (as Schelling himself claimed in 1827) the work of consciousness coming to itself. (3) It is unnecessary that there be a structure of negative self-relation inside consciousness in order to provide a system principle. For inbuilt into the concept of intellectual intuition is the idea of third power or activity which mediates between the opposed activities constitutive of consciousness, that now switches from one pole to the other but remains essentially free between them, viz. imagination. If indeed *Einbildungskraft* lies at the heart of Schelling's notion of the productivity of reason, then the system is adequately founded on self-intuition. The 1800 System, claims Marx, is adequate precisely as an *aesthetic* reconstruction of the acts constitutive of consciousness.

Marx then discusses the basic differences between Hegel's *Phenomenology* and the 1800 System. (1) Hegel maintains that 'reflection,' reason's negative self-relation, is the natural form of consciousness, while Schelling had maintained that intellectual intuition was pre-reflexive and hidden from the workings of ordinary consciousness — a profound difference and one that definitively marks the two works off from one another. (2) The *Phenomenology* is truly a history of consciousness, while the *System* is but an apparent history, a presentation of the one synthesis constitutive of the finite rational self as a succession of discrete acts. (3) Hegel's work is genuinely phenomenological; it pivots around the concept of experience and the process consciousness undergoes in coming to itself. Schelling's system, by contrast, not only culminates in aesthetic intuition, but as a whole is an aesthetic construction — a freely undertaken reconstruction of the Self's original work of freedom. (4) For Hegel the law of progress for the system is experience or the appearance of knowledge coming to itself, while for Schelling the system's unfolding is determined by the Absolute's self-objectification in determined stages or "potencies."

Marx concludes this essay with a discussion of criticisms brought against the adequacy of intellectual intuition by partisans of Schelling and Hegel alike. Indeed, in attempting to defend the cogency of intellectual intuition and in refusing to cede the place of honor to Hegelian reflection, Marx shows much sympathy for the metaphysical element in the young Schelling's thought and the theological-metaphysical tradition from which it stems.

In his third essay, "Die Aufgabe der Freiheitsschrift Schellings," Marx focuses upon the major category-revision Schelling's thought underwent when, under the influence both of theosophical writers and of the Neoplatonic tradition, he returned to his central theme, human freedom.

Marx notes that from Parmenides onward, the history of metaphysics has centered around the identity of thought and being. The 1800 System stands inside this tradition, for it must ultimately

posit a coincidence of freedom and necessity, or their metaphysical identity, beyond the boundaries of our experience. In Marx's eyes, it is the achievement of Schelling's identity-philosophy (1801-1806) to come to recognize the incongruence of that identity with human freedom. The identity-philosophy generally conceives human freedom as connected to and absorbed into the freedom of the Absolute, i.e. into its all-encompassing productivity. But as early as 1802, Schelling begins to break away from the Spinozistic engulfment of the particular by the Absolute and to edge toward a more vivid sense of human freedom. The problem of the particularity of the existent individual, its division from the Absolute, the factual character of finite existence — all of these build tensions within the identity-philosophy and finally motivate its abandonment. In the 1809 freedom-essay Schelling comes to the significant realization that if human freedom is to have a real and not merely a formal sense, it must be given an ethical and an ethical-political interpretation. Freedom is now seen concretely to be the possibility of good and evil. The tensions which had earlier rent the identity-philosophy, combined with the problem of evil, move Schelling to undertake a total reinterpretation of the concept of freedom.

Marx correctly acknowledges that the center of the 1809 *Essay* is not the notion of human freedom, but that of the Absolute. Schelling in no way abandoned his goal of systematic philosophy in the years 1809-1815, but the Absolute or system-principle is now grasped in such a way that it becomes the ground of explanation for human freedom and ethical activity. Thus Schelling comes to reinterpret the static logical-metaphysical identity of his earlier thought in moral terms. The Absolute is primarily conceived in terms of 'life' — as a process of development through conflict, as an organic process that results in personality, freedom and ethical actuality.

The 1809 *Essay* explains the evolution, or better, the personalization of God as a process which moves between two poles. At one end — and Marx insists this is just a limiting concept — there is a static primal unity, the 'Unground.' At the other end is the achievement of personality, the full realization of will. It is God's essence to go out of primal, self-contained unity, thus to differentiate himself from his origin and to move toward the fully articulated and

harmonized unity of conflicting principles which Schelling calls 'personality.'

The Unground, or 'God' as pure unity, pure being is but a limiting concept; the real Absolute is properly conceived as will. As will or self-affirming being, God is seen to contain two conflicting principles, called 'ground' and 'existence.' Each of these principles is voluntary; the life of the former is conceived as desire and (its moral counterpart) self-will, while the life of the latter is conceived as representation and (its moral counterpart) the will to self-revelation or communication. Each of these principles has an independent life; the properly personal God emerges from their conflict and interplay, i.e. he becomes their identity. This process of achieving full personality necessitates the creation of the finite realms of nature and of spirit, for only by letting the Ground go free and attain real independence can its longing for selfhood be satisfied and only by revealing himself to independent moral beings or persons can Existence's will-to-love be satisfied.

Thus Schelling pictures the developed Godhead as a personal God standing over against an independent world, a world which is the work of his freedom, his self-development. Marx observes that in 1809 Schelling attributes to the Absolute the kind of freedom that fits with a conscious and moral being. In this new kind of freedom, Marx distinguishes three separate moments: (1) freedom as ability to begin, as spontaneity or productivity (as in the 1800 System); (2) freedom as a voluntary binding of oneself to a necessity, self-determination or Spinozistic freedom; and (3) the freedom Kant had ascribed to the pure will, viz. autonomy or 'personality.'

Schelling derives his account of human freedom from the structure of the Absolute's. God's freedom, at its fullest, consists in a perfect, indissoluble union of the contradictory principles or 'wills.,' In human freedom or personality, these same principles are bound together in a finite and dissoluble way, so that human freedom is properly characterized as the power to decide for good and evil. Since in man the natural or self-enclosing principle may or may not be subordinated to the spiritual or other-affirming principle, moral goodness is seen to mean the affirmation and endorsement of the

proper order of being, while moral evil overturns that order in allowing the natural principle to attain to independence.

When Schelling contends that human freedom is the power to decide for good and for evil, he returns to his theme of the intertwining of necessity and freedom. Freedom never means arbitrary choice or caprice for him. He will claim, indeed, that "man is his own deed," but only in the sense that the one and definitive exercise of his freedom lies outside of time and consists in a 'choice of character.' The apparent freedom of an individual act is determined by the necessity of character, but this character is itself determined by a transcendental act of choice, a decision — much like Sartre's 'project' or Er's vision of the soul's choice of its fate.

Marx concludes this essay by emphasizing the central role of the concept of life in the *Freiheitsschrift*. It provides the same motor for Schelling's 'system of freedom' as negativity provides for Hegel's system, that is, it constitutes the inner self-movement which posits itself in difference and contradiction in order to recover itself as fully articulated identity. It is the achievement of the freedom-essay, claims Marx, that Schelling conceptualizes the mutual limitation of human and divine freedom as well as their integration. As such, the work attempts to philosophically actualize the ethical, i.e. to make the ethical the foundation for the whole system of philosophy.

Marx' essays are well-written and readily intelligible, and they frequently furnish valuable interpretive insights on Schelling's thought. This reviewer finds particularly informative the comparisons between Schelling's and Hegel's concepts and methods. Marx seems willing to criticize the teleological prejudice to which historians of philosophy have often fallen prey and to view Hegel and Schelling as co-workers striving to fulfill the cultural and spiritual calling of philosophy in their age, "die Aufhebung der Entzweiung."