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Review of *Schelling, Seine Bedeutung für eine
Philosophie der Natur und der Geschichte* by Ludwig
Hasler

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Book Review of *Schelling, seine Bedeutung fur eine Philosophie der Natur und der Geschichte: Referate und Kolloquien der Internationalen Schelling-Tagung, Zurich, 1979.*
Edited by Ludwig Hasler

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Schelling, seine Bedeutung fur eine Philosophie der Natur und der Geschichte: Referate und Kolloquien der Internationalen Schelling-Tagung, Zurich, 1979. Ed. by Ludwig Hasler. (Problemata, 91). Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1981. Pp. 318. ISBN 3772808123 doth, 3772808131 pbk.

This volume contains the papers delivered at the International Schelling Conference in Zurich, 1979, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Schelling's death. The theme of the conference, as enunciated by the editor, was "taking Schelling seriously." It is

Hasler's view that our age, which has learned by experience that both idealism and materialism are dead-end world-views, has much to learn from the philosopher who early in his career insisted that the human is just as much a natural being as a spiritual one, and who late in his career attempted to make human freedom the determinative power in history, both on a human and on a cosmic scale. Accordingly, the conference was organized around two themes, nature and history, and was divided into three colloquia, the first considering Schelling's early philosophy of nature, its relation to empirical science, and its philosophical significance. The second colloquium considered the large theme of Schelling's view of history, and discovered three crucial transitions in his career-long meditation on that theme, (1) a turn from the interpretation of freedom as human reason to a scheme wherein freedom pertains to divine history, the territory of mythology and revelation, (2) a turn from an idealistic approach to history towards a materialistic one, and (3) a general transition from absolute philosophy to a philosophy of finitude. A third colloquium, devoted to Schelling's political philosophy, confined itself to the period of his collaboration with Hegel in Jena. While Hasler acknowledges the superiority of Hegel's political philosophy, especially in his concrete grasp of economics, jurisprudence and politics, he notes that both philosophers entered upon the path of philosophy through their respective attempts to criticize religion as an ideological power. I will mention here only those articles which state new views in Schelling scholarship or which would be particularly of interest to students of Hegel.

Many of the contributors were not as sanguine as Hasler about Schelling's philosophical relevance; they seem, in fact, to voice a *philosophical* bad conscience about their interest in Schelling. Walter Schulz, who, a quarter-century earlier in Bad-Ragaz, put forth his interpretation of Schelling's late philosophy as 'the completion of German Idealism', freely admits that Hegel is vastly more important for our current philosophical situation, both because of the difficulty and conceptual power of his logic and because of the closeness of his analysis of the relations of society and the political state to contemporary problems. Schulz acknowledges that the essentially theological orientation of Schelling's speculation make it difficult to appropriate today, particularly because that theological orientation

took the form of an attempted reconstruction of the transcendent activity of God (no minor speculative task!), and is counterbalanced, if not contradicted, by the persistent tendency to model his concept of the deity upon human nature ("Macht und Ohnmacht der Vernunft," pp. 23-24).

The first colloquium considered Schelling's philosophy of nature. Hermann Krings offered the following succinct observations about that endeavor: (1) Schelling's interest in nature and in scientific investigation is original, though provoked by Kant. (2) Schelling always pursued philosophy of nature in the context of a grand system-strategy, namely that inorganic and organic nature, nature and human nature, the human and the divine, all be comprehended through one and the same principle. (3) Schelling never confused the speculative task of a *philosophy* of nature with the principles and methods of empirical science, though he was widely accused in his time of doing "armchair science." (4) He actually achieved a remarkable congruence between his speculative philosophy and the concepts which occupied scientific attention around 1800, e.g. electricity-theory, galvanism, irritability as the physiological foundation of sensibility. (5) Ultimately, nature-philosophy had no impact on the empirical sciences except the one appropriate to any philosophical meditation on the practice and the content of the sciences, namely to draw attention to the principles of scientific investigation and to their impact on how humans perceive themselves and their world. (pp. 73-76).

Dietrich von Engelhardt fills in the details of Krings' outline. Schelling's vision of nature, on his view, is determined by four metaphysical theses, (1) the identity of spirit and nature, (2) nature as an evolutionary manifestation of an original involution, (3) nature as law-giver unto itself, (4) nature as a teleological dialectic, a unity-in-tension between productivity and product. As a result of these commitments, and especially the last, Schelling came to view the whole universe as a global manifestation of the unconscious teleology exhibited in the living organism and to accord special significance to the interpretation of biological phenomena. Engelhardt recounts in detail the stormy reception accorded nature-philosophy between 1798 and 1807, which culminated in Schelling's decision to forego any further publications on the subject and to communicate his views on it

only "in live lecture, to the true initiates" (p. 84). He notes too that Hegel's philosophy of nature came on the scene too late (1817, 1827, 1830) to attract serious attention; Schelling's silence on the subject, enthusiasts' distorted versions thereof, and the general rejection of the endeavor by the scientific community produced inattention to Hegel's thoroughgoing and more detailed pursuit of the same project (pp. 77-98).

Reinhard Low throws further light on the systematic significance of Schelling's philosophy of nature by noting the emphasis it placed on the supposed irreducible nature of *quality*. The progress of science itself in the 19th Century proved the reverse, that qualities or properties are but the appearances of fundamentally quantitative processes, and hence are both reducible and constructible. In contrast to the world-view suggested by mathematical physics, Schelling's concern was basically ideological, attempting to reconcile science with the ideology of humanism. Löw pursues the agonizing question of spirit versus matter as far as Nietzsche and into our own century, noting that either "man himself becomes a piece of anthropomorphism" or that the social and ethical dimensions of human life must somewhat arbitrarily be ceded philosophical priority (pp. 99-106).

Nelly Tsouyopoulos and Richard Toellner contribute exceptionally interesting papers on Schelling's impact upon contemporary medicine, which was in severe conceptual disarray at the end of the 18th Century, with clinical practice and pathology divorced from one another, and mechanistic and vitalistic methods of biological explanation competing for attention. Tsouyopoulos shows how Schelling brought together John Brown's radically naturalistic understanding of human life, Fichte's intuition that activity and passivity are equally modes of the subject's action, and Franz Roschlaub's concept of "irritability" - roughly the symbiotic dependence of an organism upon its environment - to form a concept of the organism in which a dialectic of quantity and quality replaces any such "occult" notion as "vital force." This, in turn, allows a naturalistic pathology to emerge, one which views illness not as some supposed "spiritual" event, but as one of the modes of an organism's natural adjustment to the demands of its environment (pp. 107-116). Toellner

documents Schelling's impact on the scientific world with two histories from the so-called Romantic School of medicine, that of Jan Purkyne (1787-1868) and K.E. von Bauer (1792-1876). Competent empiricists in their respective researches into physiology and embryology, both men sought to understand nature as a whole on the model supplied by Schelling's philosophy of nature, and both envisioned medicine (to use Bauer's words) as a "cooperation of observation and reflection" (pp. 117-129).

The second colloquium, devoted to Schelling's philosophy of history, is the most diffuse of the three, since all participants agree that for Schelling "history" was a fundamental problem and a turning-point rather than an isolated territory which could once and for all be mapped onto a systematic model. Hans Michael Baumgartner (pp. 175-192) views Schelling's whole philosophy as a dialectic of the claims of reason and the claims of history, whose three phases constitute (1) an unsuccessful attempt to think the identity of reason and history, (2) an unsuccessful attempt to deduce history from reason, and (3) the overcoming of reason itself or its self-finitization in the face of history. All this rather reminds one of the talk of ideology, the social history of concepts, and the cultural "nesting" of theory which hermeneutical philosophers and apostate analysts purvey in our day, but Xavier Tilliette (pp. 193-202), Walter Ehrhardt (pp. 239-244) and Horst Fuhrmans (pp. 227-231) all remind the reader that Schelling's vision of history is a thoroughly religious one. Manfred Buhr (pp. 233-237) goes so far as to claim that Schelling's philosophy represents a transition from "rational history" to "historical irrationality," a "speculative Good Friday" in which both reason and history lose their lives. The "bad conscience" experienced by philosophers dealing with such material today is explicitly addressed by Hans Jorg Sandkiihler (pp. 213-225) who finds in such speculation the proclamation of a normative idea of progress totally unrelated to the vicissitudes of social-economic-political existence. Schelling's philosophy of history, he concludes, hides the real subject of history.

The third colloquium, on Schelling's and Hegel's early political philosophy, features both close textual scholarship and vigorous interpretive debate. The controversy turns on Hegel's 1802/03 *System of Ethical Life*, with its obvious dependence on Schelling's method of

"potentiation," and on the lack of an authentic political philosophy in Schelling's writings after 1799. Walter Ch. Zimmerle (pp. 255-278) notes two shortcomings in the existing literature on Hegel's early years in Jena; scholars either simply assert Hegel's dependence on Schelling without bringing the Schellingian elements to bear on what Hegel says, or they simply focus on how Hegel's early concept, say, of society, fits into his mature vision of the philosophical system, without at all looking to his procedure or method. Zimmerle contends there is a close connection between the double-subsumption methodology of the *System of Ethical Life* and Schelling's method of potentiation as spelled out in the 1802 *Further Expositions from the System of Philosophy*, suggesting that in 1802 Hegel did not view the three-potency schema as a lifeless formalism, but as an analytic-discursive method for depicting the productive activity of the Absolute itself. While we cannot present his exposition in full detail, he indeed offers aid to the puzzled reader of *Ethical Life* by suggesting that therein *universality* corresponds to *intuition* (as in the paradigm case of intellectual intuition of the Absolute), while *particularity* corresponds to the *conceptual*, that is, the divisive, discursive and finite cognition proffered by mere concepts. What is controversial about Zimmerle's interpretation is his assertion that a tension between *cognizing* cognition and *cognized* cognition motivates a "dialectic" in the 1802/03 text, and thus explains the outbreak of negativity in the section entitled "Absolute Freedom and Destruction." Heinz Zimmerle has argued that this section of the manuscript signals a complete break with the Schellingian method of potentiation.

Ludwig Siep (pp. 279-288) vigorously advances an opposite and more orthodox (at least to Hegelians) interpretation which insists that Hegel employs Schelling's method of potencies only to cancel non-ethical relations, and that within the ethical sphere the relations are developed purely in terms of the negativity of the absolute concept. Siep rightly notes the static and organic nature of Schelling's power-schema, which is in sharp contrast to Hegel's ascending and negating hierarchy of family / war / society, He also notes Hegel's tendency in 1800-1802 to look to "Life" as the overarching category, which sharply contrasts with the mechanistic view of the state Schelling presented in the 1796/197 *New Deduction of Natural Rights*, Both Zimmerle's and Siep's views are well-documented and well-argued, and they form a

basis for a more careful discussion of Hegel's development from 1801-1803, They will certainly be of use to anyone interested in either the form or content of *Ethical Life*.

I have only been able to provide a cursory overview of the colloquia's more interesting papers. Two of the invited papers which open the volume are worthy of careful attention, Walter Schulz's "Macht und Ohnmacht der Vernunft," and Werner Marx's "Das Wesen des Bosen und seine Rolle in der Geschichte," This volume contains much fine scholarship and provocative reflection for the scholar interested in Schelling and Hegel, but it is especially useful for those interested in exploring how Hegel took and transformed the views he found around him in the course of his philosophical maturation.