

## Introduction

Lara Ostaric

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling entered the Tübinger Stift, a Lutheran theological seminary, in 1790 when he was only fifteen years old. His roommates were Hölderlin and Hegel, who were five years older than he. Their meeting in the Stift was a unique event in history because it offered the conditions for the most productive period in the history of German philosophy. The philosophical milieu in the Tübinger Stift was shaped to a great extent by the influence of Jacobi and the Pantheism Controversy and the dogmatic reading of Kant's practical philosophy by the Tübingen theologians. The Tübingen theologians (Gottlob Christian Storr, Johann Friedrich Flatt, Friedrich Gottlieb Süskind, and Georg Christian Rapp) used Kant's Postulates of Pure Practical Reason to reinforce their orthodox theological positions. In other words, they intentionally interpreted Kant's postulates so that God, freedom, and immortality were no longer merely objects of practical reason, but connected with doctrines of revelation. The *Stiffler* were determined to preserve Kant's critical spirit by using Kant against the self-proclaimed Tübingen "Kantians." In addition, they received the French Revolution with great enthusiasm, which further encouraged their rebelliousness against the orthodoxies of the Stift as well as their foundational philosophical ambitions, which are best summarized in the following passage from Schelling's letter to Hegel on January 6, 1795: "Who would wish to bury himself in the dust of Antiquity when the course of *his* time tears him towards and with itself in every moment. I live and weave presently in philosophy. Philosophy has not come to its end yet. Kant has given the results: the premises are still missing. And who can understand the results without the premises?" (AA III.1: 16).<sup>1</sup> In this spirit, Schelling, while still thinking of himself as a true Kantian, insists that philosophy must begin with an absolutely certain first principle, namely, freedom: "Philosophy must begin with the *Unconditioned*. But the

<sup>1</sup> Schelling citations are my own translation.

question presents itself what the center is of the *Unconditioned*, the ‘I,’ or the ‘not-I.’ If this question is answered, then *everything* is answered. On my view, the highest principle of philosophy is the pure absolute ‘I,’ i.e., the ‘I’ insofar as it is merely an ‘I,’ not determined by objects, but posited [*gesetzt*] through *Freedom*. The A and  $\omega$  of all philosophy is freedom” (Letter to Hegel, February 4, 1795, AA III.1: 22). However, while Fichte, inspired by Reinhold, believed that the unconditioned principle is to be found in the Cartesian self-certainty of consciousness, for Schelling the unconditioned principle is something that transcends consciousness and is the unifying ground of consciousness and nature. Fichte said that the Unconditioned is to be thought in the *I*, but for Schelling it is to be thought in the *I as such*.<sup>2</sup>

Among the *Stifler*, Schelling had a reputation of being a prodigy. Already at the age of fifteen he had an excellent command of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic, was fluent in French, English, Italian, and Spanish, and had a basic knowledge of Sanskrit. He published his first philosophical essay, *On the Possibility of an Absolute Form of Philosophy* [*Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*], in 1794 when he was only nineteen years old. His academic career matched his reputation and, unlike the careers of his older roommates, was marked by one success after another. He was given a professorship in Jena when he was only twenty-three years old. However, the same success did not follow the legacy of his philosophy. One of the reasons for the negative reception of his philosophy was its rejection by Hegel in his 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>3</sup> For a long time Schelling was treated as a stepping-stone from Fichte to Hegel and as a protean thinker who was constantly changing his philosophical views so that no definite philosophical position can be ascribed to him with certainty. Consequently, relatively little attention was given to his thought.<sup>4</sup>

It is not until the twentieth century that philosophers will engage again Schelling’s thought in more depth. I have in mind here above all the influential studies of Schelling by Heidegger, Walter Schulz, Dieter Jähnig,

<sup>2</sup> This is Manfred Frank’s paraphrase of Dieter Henrich’s lecture in Heidelberg, winter semester 1965–6 in Frank 1985: 24.

<sup>3</sup> In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel unfairly characterizes Schelling’s conception of intellectual intuition as “the night in which all cows are black” and, hence, as a form of philosophical cognition which does not allow individual determinations.

<sup>4</sup> The exception here is Schelling’s strong influence on English Romantic poets (especially Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and the influence of his critique of Hegel on Kierkegaard, who attended Schelling’s Berlin lectures in the 1840s.

## Introduction

3

and Manfred Frank in Germany, and by Vladimir Jankélévitch and Jean-François Marquet in France.<sup>5</sup> Schelling influenced not only philosophers but also theologians of the twentieth century, both Catholic and Protestant, Xavier Tilliette and Paul Tillich, respectively. The Anglophone philosophical reception of Schelling was considerably delayed and only in recent years have some efforts been made to rethink Schelling's tarnished legacy.<sup>6</sup> This volume is a further contribution to those recent efforts. It is the first collection of essays in English<sup>7</sup> that systematically traces the historical development of his thought from the Transcendental Philosophy and *Naturphilosophie* of his early period (1794–1800), through his *Identitätsphilosophie* (1801–9), and then *Freiheitsschrift* and the *Weltalter* of his middle period (1809–27), and, finally, his Positive and Negative Philosophy and critique of Hegel in his late period (1827–54). The volume offers a more nuanced understanding of German Idealism than the one offered by an oversimplified narrative “from Kant to Hegel,”<sup>8</sup> which portrays this philosophical movement as a teleological progression that begins with Kant, is advanced by Fichte and Schelling, and culminates in Hegel's system, which synthesizes all prior views. To be sure, Schelling's so-called objective idealism, with an unconditioned principle which transcends both subject and object, marks a move away from Fichte's subjective idealism and paves a path to Hegel's system. However, by paying greater attention to the constellation of the ideas that motivated Schelling's thought, it is possible to appreciate him more as an original thinker, a thinker whose impact has reached beyond the original stage of German Idealism, and whose ideas are of importance to us today.

Some examples of how Schelling's thought still resonates with us today (and the list is by no means intended to be exhaustive) are the following. Schelling's view that there are aspects of the self that continuously escape self-consciousness is present in Slavoj Žižek's provocative work on Schelling, which further indicates the ongoing relevance of Schelling's philosophy for psychoanalysis. The central question of Schelling's early system, namely, the question “How must a world be constituted for a moral

<sup>5</sup> See Heidegger 1971, Schulz 1955, Jähnig 1966, Frank 1975, 1985, Jankélévitch 1933, and Marquet 1968.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Bowie 1993, Snow 1996, Beiser 2002: 465–595, Kosch 2006a: 66–121, and Shaw 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Norman/Welchman 2001 and Wirth 2005 are the only available collections of essays on Schelling in English. These collections, however, relate Schelling exclusively to issues in contemporary Continental philosophy.

<sup>8</sup> *Von Kant bis Hegel* is the title of Richard Kroner's influential study of German Idealism. See Kroner 1961. However, Hegel himself deserves credit for this teleological understanding of German Idealism because his writings on the history of philosophy show that this is how he understood his own role as the culminating phase in the history of this movement.

being?,"<sup>9</sup> which is also the question of the unity of theoretical and practical reason that Schelling was inspired to pursue by Kant's third *Critique*, is the main motivating force of his *Naturphilosophie*. His *Naturphilosophie* developed beyond Kant's critique of mechanism and paved the way for a teleological conception of nature that is not radically different from the underlying structure of the human spirit. Contemporary environmental studies can draw inspiration from Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*. His aesthetics and philosophy of art assigned a unique place to art, a place that was traditionally assigned to logic in the history of philosophy, namely, art as the "organon" or instrument of philosophy. In other words, Schelling admits the limitations of philosophy, and for him it is no longer a self-sufficient practice. It is a practice that needs art insofar as art is understood as the object of a philosophy of art that interprets self-consciousness, which is the condition of philosophical practice in its objective form. Schelling's Philosophy of Identity attempts to understand the identity between nature and spirit not as a simple identity but as a complex identity that takes into account the difference of the members that comprise one and the same whole. Schelling's understanding of identity between mind and nature resonates in the mind-body debates of contemporary analytic philosophy, especially the works of Geach and Davidson. His conception of the freedom of the will (in his *Freiheitsschrift*) as freedom that exceeds reason's determination is Schelling's attempt to provide a positive conception of moral evil – one that, he thinks, is lacking in Kant. Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* also anticipates the later existentialist tradition insofar as it grounds our agency in a reality that exceeds the grasp of reason. Schelling's Negative Philosophy is the locus of his critique of Hegel's view that reflection entirely determines and exhausts existence. Schelling's view that being precedes all reflection entails the idea of historical and empirical contingency and thus paved the way to Marxist materialism and to other current European philosophies that are keen on emphasizing the limits of our rationality.

While there is much more continuity to Schelling's thought than is generally acknowledged, the different stages in the development of his philosophical system should not be seen as a sign of intellectual immaturity, nor as the inevitable result of the influence of many different

<sup>9</sup> Bernstein 2003: 185. The citation is from the so called "Oldest Program for a System of German Idealism [*Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*]," a short fragment published and titled by Franz Rosenzweig in 1918. While the fragment is written in Hegel's handwriting, it expresses mainly Schelling's and also Hölderlin's ideas.

## Introduction

5

philosophical positions. In spite of his early ambitions as a young prodigy to move beyond Kant's modest philosophical system (its dependence on common experience both in theoretical and practical domains, its claims to ignorance of things as they are in themselves, and its lack of an absolutely certain principle as its basis),<sup>10</sup> Schelling's reformulations of his own philosophical system are perhaps an indication of *his* modesty and his recognition that, while rigorous and systematic, philosophical reflection is not omnipotent before the complexity of the human condition.

\*\*\*

The volume comprises eleven essays. In "The Early Schelling on the Unconditioned," Eric Watkins clarifies how the early Schelling comes to employ the notion of the "unconditioned" at the center of his philosophical project. In particular, Watkins provides an analysis of central passages in two of Schelling's early essays, *On the Possibility of an Absolute Form of Philosophy* [*Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt*] (1794) and *Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge* [*Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen*] (1795) in order to argue that (without denying the influence of other figures on Schelling's early thought, such as Fichte or Reinhold) it is Kant's specific views on the unconditioned that play a crucial role in the development of a number of fundamental features of Schelling's early thought.

Michael N. Forster, in his essay "Schelling and Skepticism," argues that Hegel's accusations in his Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that Schelling's philosophy is dogmatic and vulnerable to skepticism are not entirely warranted. They are true of a brief period while Schelling was still in Jena, 1801–2, but they do not apply to Schelling's career as a whole. Forster shows that Schelling's views on skepticism and its relation to philosophy went through three different phases. The first of these is a Fichte-inspired position that he held during the period 1794–1800; the second a Hegel-inspired position that he held briefly in 1802–3; and the third a Romanticism-inspired position that he adopted around 1821. At the end of his essay, Forster considers a fourth phase of Schelling's attempt to grapple with skepticism, namely, his Positive Philosophy as a modification of his Romanticism-inspired position.

In "The Concept of Life in Early Schelling," I show how in the early stages of his *Naturphilosophie* Schelling is motivated by the issue of the necessary correspondence between the self and nature and, therefore,

<sup>10</sup> On the "modesty" of Kant's philosophical system see Ameriks 2000, ch. 1: 37–77.

attempts to demonstrate that nature is not a dead object of self-consciousness, but something that is at the same time a subject and its own object. Nature must not be conceived as a dead mechanism, but as a living organization and as an “analogue of reason” (AA 1.8: 31) and freedom because to be one’s own subject and object is to be self-determined. This is what Schelling considers to be the essential characteristic of *life*. The essay traces the development of his conception of life through three seminal works of his early *Naturphilosophie*: the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* [*Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*] (1797), *On the World-Soul* [*Von der Weltseele*] (1798), and *The First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* [*Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie*] (1799). This is necessary in order to show that from the very beginning Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* and his method of the construction of nature presuppose a common ground of mind and nature, one that unifies both and can be identified with neither. Thus, Schelling’s early writings, contrary to the prevalent view, are part of a continuous progressive development in his philosophical system.

Paul Guyer, in his essay “Knowledge and Pleasure in the Aesthetics of Schelling,” analyzes central passages from Schelling’s 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* [*System des transzendentalen Idealismus*] and 1802–3 lectures on *The Philosophy of Art* [*Philosophie der Kunst*] in order to show how Schelling adopted and transformed Kant’s philosophy of fine art. Guyer argues that Kant created a synthesis of the new aesthetics of free play, developed in mid-eighteenth-century Scotland and Germany, with the Classical theory that aesthetic experience is a distinctive form of the apprehension of truth. Schelling’s aesthetics favors a purely cognitivist approach and the view that aesthetic experience is pleasurable only because it releases us from the pain of an inescapable contradiction in the human condition.

In “‘Exhibiting the Particular in the Universal’: Philosophical Construction and Intuition in Schelling’s Philosophy of Identity (1801–1804),” Daniel Breazeale discusses Schelling’s method of philosophical construction in his Philosophy of Identity. Influenced by Kant’s *Metaphysical Foundations* (where “to construct” a concept is “to exhibit [*darstellen*] a priori the intuition corresponding to it”) as well as Fichte’s later development of this philosophical method, Schelling develops his own new conception of philosophical construction. Breazeale proceeds by focusing on eight of the more salient features of Schelling’s method of construction: (1) its “absolute” standpoint, (2) its principle (the law of rational identity), (3) its organ (intellectual intuition), (4) its actual method (exhibition of the

## Introduction

7

particular in the universal), (5) its elements (ideas of reason), (6) its product (the System of Identity), (7) its truth and reality, and (8) the unteachable, innate capacity for intellectual intuition (philosophical genius). In his conclusion, he offers an examination and criticism of Schelling's conception of philosophical construction.

Manfred Frank's essay, "Identity of Identity and Non-Identity": Schelling's Path to the 'Absolute System of Identity,'" focuses on the core thought of Schelling's Absolute System of Identity, which concerns a form of identity that is not simple, but rather conceived in such a way that two different things pertain entirely to one and the same whole. Frank proceeds by describing the problems in early modern philosophy for which Schelling's notion of identity attempts to provide a solution. He goes on to discuss the figures from the history of philosophy who influenced Schelling's mature Philosophy of Identity, and he shows the relevance of Schelling's notion of identity for contemporary mind-body theories. In conclusion, Frank addresses the difference between Schelling's and Hegel's notions of identity.

In "Idealism and Freedom in Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*," Michelle Kosch distinguishes between a "formal" conception of freedom (i.e., a characterization of free will that allows for a distinction between imputable and non-imputable behavior) and a "substantive" conception of freedom (i.e., the conception of free will as a source of substantive moral imperatives). Kosch contends that Schelling's view in the *Freiheitsschrift*, according to which idealism offers a merely formal conception of freedom, suggests that he means to employ aspects of the accounts of formal freedom provided by Kant and Fichte while rejecting their accounts of substantive freedom. Kosch further argues that Schelling's rejection of the substantive component of Kant's and Fichte's accounts undermines the philosophical motivation for his own early compatibilism, and that his alternative substantive account turns out to be inconsistent with the account of formal freedom he endorses in the *Freiheitsschrift*.

In her essay, "Beauty Reconsidered: Freedom and Virtue in Schelling's Aesthetics," Jennifer Dobe argues that Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift* (1809), contrary to the prevalent view, offers resources for identifying Schelling's new and innovative approach to aesthetics and for rescuing his aesthetics from the static and lifeless system of his earlier Philosophy of Identity. By focusing on the key passages from Schelling's 1807 speech to the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Munich (*Über das Verhältnis der bildenden Künste zu der Natur*) and the *Weltalter* fragments of 1811–15, Dobe shows how Schelling begins to augment his aesthetics on the basis of the new



conception of freedom advanced in the *Freiheitsschrift*. This new philosophical outlook allows Schelling to emphasize the dynamic nature of aesthetic experience, the *attraction* of the observer to the object of beauty, and the irreducible particularity of beauty.

In “Nature and Freedom in Schelling and Adorno,” Andrew Bowie shows how the dialectical tension between existence and its ground, self-determined reason and its “other,” in Schelling’s *Freiheitsschrift* opens up space for a non-dogmatic understanding of “nature” (i.e., an understanding of nature as something that needs to be legitimated and not something used as a legitimation) and its relationship to the subject and thus to freedom. In the ground/existence relationship, Adorno, like Schelling, seeks a further self-critical turn, namely, the idea that because reason cannot be self-grounding it must incorporate a sense of its historicity. Their responses are not only significant in the light of contemporary scientific attempts to reduce the realm of self-determination to a causal account of nature, but also because they offer an alternative to the neo-Hegelian approach of Robert Pippin, who thinks nature can be “left behind” by a normative account of human self-determination.

Günter Zöller’s essay, “Church and State: Schelling’s Political Philosophy of Religion,” focuses on the relation between church and state in Schelling’s *Stuttgart Private Lecture Course* from 1810 and his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* from 1809. Zöller proceeds by presenting, in section I, the historical background of Schelling’s political philosophy of religion in early modern thinking and in Kant’s reconfiguration of the relation between ethics, politics, and religion. In section II, he presents the development of Schelling’s political philosophy from a liberal and legal conception of the state to an absolutist and ethical conception. In section III of his essay, Zöller discusses Schelling’s philosophico-theological critique of the state. In the last section, he assesses Schelling’s shift from proposing religion’s integration into the state to advocating the state’s subordination under religion.

The central focus of Fred Rush’s essay, “Schelling’s Critique of Hegel,” is Schelling’s Berlin lectures, delivered in the 1840s and early 1850s, where Schelling deploys a broad distinction between two approaches to philosophy: “negative” and “positive.” Schelling’s Positive Philosophy contains his conservative views concerning the necessity for a “new mythology” and “revelation.” His concept of Negative Philosophy, argues Rush, is characterized by an emphasis on the discovery of purportedly overarching, a priori, and strictly necessary rational structures that govern the world, at the expense of the individuality of entities. Schelling identifies this view



*Introduction*

9

with Hegel's philosophy, which he believes is philosophically inadequate. Rush's essay poses the question of the extent to which Schelling's critique of Hegel is valid. His main claim is that Schelling's criticisms largely retain their force, although some of them show the late Schelling to be closer to Hegel on some points than the philosophical polemic would at first suggest.

## CHAPTER I

*The early Schelling on the unconditioned**Eric Watkins*

Considerable attention has been devoted in recent decades to understanding how Schelling's early philosophical works emerged out of the thought of the post-Kantian figures who were active in Jena and Tübingen (and beyond) in the early 1790s. Part of the justification for this attention derives from the fact that these figures were interested in nothing less than the very foundation and possibility of all philosophical thought during a period of arguably unparalleled flourishing of philosophical thought. Further, Schelling in particular was at the center of this development, since two of his earliest works, which contributed significantly to his being appointed professor of philosophy in Jena at the tender age of twenty-three, namely *Über die Möglichkeit einer Form der Philosophie überhaupt* (1794) [hereafter: *Form-Schrift*] and *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie oder über das Unbedingte im menschlichen Wissen* (1795) [hereafter: *Ich-Schrift*], focus on precisely this issue by setting out a foundationalist program and providing a first attempt at working out its fundamental principles, which is crucial insofar as it provides the basic framework for his later, more mature philosophical efforts.

Since Schelling was familiar with Fichte's groundbreaking publications, including those that were fresh off the press, and he was still only in his teens when composing these earliest works, it is tempting to think that he was primarily following Fichte's lead. Thus Reinhard Lauth and Frederick Beiser argue that Schelling was heavily influenced by Fichte, engaged in an essentially Fichtean project, utilizing essentially Fichtean tools (terms, distinctions, assumptions).<sup>1</sup> Yet other scholars have rejected the idea that Schelling's position mimics Fichte's, seeing a fundamental independence in his thought.<sup>2</sup> This view has significant

<sup>1</sup> See Lauth 1975, who distinguishes three distinct phases of Schelling's engagement with Fichte between 1795 and 1801, and Beiser 2002: 470.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Henrich 2004: 1609, 1651, who emphasizes that Fichte's foundationalist project is essentially epistemological with its focus on certainty and acts of thinking, whereas Schelling's more