

Schelling's Afterlives: Introduction

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When, in 1798, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling appeared on Germany's philosophical scene at the tender age of twenty-three, he was hailed as the latest and brightest star in a firmament that had already been well lit by a rapid succession of major thinkers. Yet at the time of his death, in 1854, most observers saw his significance as largely a thing of a distinctively distant past. In fact, from the 1820s onwards, it had been Schelling's younger friend and rival, Georg Hegel, who was perceived as the culminating point of the intellectual movement of the day. While an attempt was made to paint a late development of Schelling's philosophy as a possible trajectory beyond Hegel's idealism, this project never really took off the ground. An invitation to Schelling by the Prussian king to lecture at Berlin in 1841 certainly raised expectations, but the lectures themselves soon fell flat and its audience dwindled quickly. Ultimately, Schelling himself gave up on this last attempt of a public foray after only four years, in 1845.

It was, consequently, the historiography of the Hegelians that has largely defined Schelling's significance as well as his limits for much of his reception. In this perception, he was accorded the role of a forerunner, an important step on the path leading from Kant to Hegel via Fichte and Schelling. Schelling, it was conceded, initiated a turn to the philosophy of nature and thus a reversal of course away from the extreme subjectivism of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* but one-sided in its own way and thus only intelligible from the vantage point Hegel's synthesis. A synthesis, of course, was the one thing Schelling himself had never accomplished, and those trying to do him more justice were inevitably faced with the problem of a succession of developmental periods each with its own priorities and principles. It was, consequently, hard to establish 'Schelling's' view on anything in particular, and this state of affairs, arguably, further supported the Hegelian reading of him as a transitional figure even among historians of philosophy who were not themselves Hegelians.

Summarising Schelling's intellectual biography and his reception in these terms raises the question of what justifies a collection of essays on Schelling's afterlives. The answer, which we hope will be substantiated by the entirety of the articles published in the present issue, is that Schelling's reception was, after all, more complex than the blanket reduction of his role to that of a forerunner of Hegel would suggest. While it is certainly the case that his influence cannot match that of either Kant or Hegel, there is a fascinating history to be explored of readers intrigued by the specifics of Schelling's approach rather than his part in the story of German Idealism. While this reception never became mainstream, it unites a considerable number of interesting thinkers from very different backgrounds. Many are, like Schelling himself, located on the borderline between philosophy and theology or, at any rate, between philosophy and religious thought. Most of them, again like Schelling himself, defy easy categorisation in terms of their intellectual, disciplinary or indeed religious affiliation. They range from Russian religious thinkers, such as Solovyev and Bulgakov, to German Protestant theologians. Amongst the latter they encompass individuals as different as F. C. Baur and David Strauss in the nineteenth century, and Paul Tillich in the twentieth. Schelling's students include as well, however, the Catholic theologians of the nineteenth century Tübingen School and their more recent heirs, such as Walter Kasper or Xavier

Tilliette. Schelling's specific blend of philosophy and religious thought also appealed to the twentieth century's existentialist philosophers who sought for themselves a new way of relating faith and reason, often beyond the remits of traditional Christianity. Finally, his thought had a particular appeal to Jewish thinkers in both the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

2. The reasons for this attraction can be attributed to a number of partly overlapping areas of interest which Schelling, throughout his developmental periods, seemed to connect in evocative ways. In the first instance, they are history and religion, but to them must immediately be added the concepts of art and nature. Most of those who were inspired by Schelling since the early nineteenth century were fascinated and intrigued by the creative links he established between these dimensions of human existence. Due to the diverse ways in which these topics could be of interest, the 'Schellingians' comprised extremely different people – orthodox and heterodox theologians, romantic literati, historians, and existentialist philosophers. What united them was their common concern for an understanding of human nature drawing on resources beyond the increasingly dominant natural sciences, including mythology, literature, and religious revelation. They acknowledged, in other words, the existence as well as the importance of dimensions of human existence that were threatened by the modern rationalisation of all aspects of human society even though they diverged on the conclusions that were to be drawn from this analysis.

This can be seen, first of all, in the reception of Schelling's philosophy of history. A main source of inspiration in this regard were his *Lectures on Academic Study*, perhaps his single most influential published text. The *Lectures* fed into the wide-ranging debates, originally initiated by Immanuel Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*, about the future shape of the academy and the coherence of its subjects. Schelling's historicist readers found on offer there an attractive middle way between a purely empirical historiography and the purely abstract idealism of Fichte and even, to an extent, Hegel. Most of these early historicists, however, approached history as part of a broader, intellectual agenda, a novel search for the truth about humanity, its origins, and its destiny; interest in Schelling as a deeply historical thinker was thus fuelled by the links he established between history and religion, specifically Christianity, and between history and art. Schelling's notion of the historian as an artist captured the romantic imagination and was picked up by various early historicists, such as Friedrich Creuzer and Wilhelm von Humboldt, while theological readers, such as F. C. Baur, were keen to emphasise the religious and even theological dimension of history when conceived in a Schellingian way.

Configured in a slightly different way, Schelling's historical conception of philosophy became attractive to a range of Catholic theologians beginning with Johann Sebastian Drey and Johannes Evangelist von Kuhn, major representatives of the so called Catholic Tübingen School. Walter Kasper's momentous appropriation of Schelling's thought for a modern theology of history consciously and explicitly follows this earlier Tübingen trajectory. Despite major differences, Catholic interest in Schelling since the 1830s can as a whole be understood as motivated by the search for an alternative to the scholastic approach of neo-Thomism emerging around the same time. If Schelling seemed to offer to early historicists a philosophy of history more amenable to historical research than Hegel's absolute idealism,

his attraction for Catholic theologians lay in a philosophical approach to history that seemed to leave more space for transcendence and the notion of a personal God.

While the Tübingen theologians initially based their reception on Schelling's early, published work, they were later happy to use his *Philosophy of Revelation*, which gradually became known from Schelling's Berlin lectures, for their project of a truly Catholic theology of history. In a comparable way, the historicist interest in Schelling's early work on the Protestant side, as exemplified by F. C. Baur, was complemented by Paul Tillich's use of Schelling's late philosophy for a Protestant appropriation of this philosopher's thought in the twentieth century. At the same time, Tillich's interpretation of Schelling's late philosophy connected an emphasis on history with an interest in a set of questions that became characteristic for existentialist philosophy around the middle of the twentieth, as espoused by Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel.

This 'existentialist' Schelling, for all the exegetical problems connected with this interpretative construction, links the cluster of broadly historical readings of Schelling's philosophy with a second, major strand which one might, for want of a better word, call mystical. This strand essentially follows the religious dimension of Schelling's thought rightly recognising there a specific tradition of esoteric or spiritual philosophy as previously exemplified in authors from ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite to Jacob Boehme. In 1835 already, F. C. Baur introduced Schelling into his history of what he called *Christian Gnosis* as the true successor of Boehme, and this perception has dominated interest for Schelling among a variety of authors from Vladimir Solovyev to Franz Rosenzweig, and from the American transcendentalists to Sergei Bulgakov. Schelling, for these thinkers, stands for an intellectual heritage present also in German Idealism more generally, the somewhat subversive line of thought flowing from early modern Platonists, Gnostics, religious enthusiasts, and Kabbalists. While Schelling in his own time was by no means isolated in his interest for this particular historical and intellectual trajectory, his approach nonetheless became particularly associated with it.

3. The contributions to this special issue of *The Journal of Philosophy and Theology* span the field thus described. Their purpose is not to give a full account of Schelling's reception for which research has only just begun, but they are neither meant as an exhaustive exploration of a limited trajectory of Schelling's influence. Instead, they are intended to provide a broad overview of a novel yet important and fascinating area of research. In their entirety, they hope to define Schelling's afterlives as a worthwhile dimension of intellectual history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If it can be easily overlooked, this is partly due to factors that make it uniquely fascinating, not least its spread across the boundaries of language, religion, and academic discipline. Studying Schelling's afterlives, brings together Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox theologians; scholars of Judaism; philosophers of religion; literary critics; intellectual historians; and probably others as well.

The present issue takes its starting point from the different religious contexts in which Schelling has been received. The main strands within the collection are formed by studies in his influence on nineteenth-century Protestant (Rohls, Zachhuber) and Catholic theology (Kaplan); on twentieth century Orthodox (Vasilyev), Catholic (Russo), and Protestant (Danz) theology; and on Jewish thought in the nineteenth (Franks) and twentieth century (Bielik-

Robson). These articles are, inevitably, centred on Schelling's reception in Germany although they indicate the presence of his thought outside his original country.

A second group of contributions makes the transnational dimension of Schelling's afterlives much more explicit. Individual studies demonstrate his importance for intellectual debates in nineteenth-century Russia (Bielfeldt), England (Rajan), and America (Rasmussen), as well as twentieth century France (Whistler).

All contributors are united in their conviction that the study of Schelling's reception in nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy and theology adds an important dimension to our understanding of the intellectual currents that have shaped Western modernity during this period. Focussing on Schelling's traces brings into view often neglected or forgotten, 'untimely' features of this development which help understanding our world in its full complexity.