SVENSK TEOLOGISK KVARTALSKRIFTS REDAKTIONSRÅD

MARTIN BERNTSON
Göteborgs universitet

ANNE KATRINE DE HEMMER GUDME
Universitetet i Oslo

PATRIK HAGMAN
Åbo Akademi

MICHAEL HJÄLM
Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm,
Sankt Ignatios Akademi

TORSTEN JANSON
Lunds universitet

TONE STANGELAND KAUFMAN
MF vitenskapelig høyskole

STÅLE J. KRISTIANSEN
NLA Høgskolen

ANNI MARIA LAATO
Åbo Akademi

OUTI LEHTIPUU
Helsingfors universitet

KAREN MARIE LETH-NISSEN
Köpenhamns universitet

LINDE LINDKVIST
Institutet för mänskliga
rättigheter

MARIUS TIMMANN MJAALAND
Oslo universitet

ELSE MARIE WIBERG PEDERSEN
Aarhus universitet

PÉTUR PÉTURSSON
Islands universitet

PAMELA SLOTTE
Åbo Akademi
Helsingfors universitet

HANNA STENSTRÖM
Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm

KIRSI I. STJERNA
California Lutheran University

DAVID THURFJELL
Södertörns högskola

LINN TONSTAD
Yale Divinity School

ERIKA WILLANDER
Umeå universitet

S|T|K INNEHÅLL 1 2026

In memoriam David Tracy (1939–2025)
Werner G. Jeanrond 1

Ledare: Naturen och viljan till liv
Clara Berg & Astrid Grelz 7

The Anguish of Nature
Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback 10

Life at the Margins of Matter: 'Circumcising' Schelling's Organicist Philosophy with Hans Jonas
Astrid Grelz 21

The Freedom of Organs: The Corporatism of Schelling's Freedom Essay
Ariën Voogt 36

The Beginning of All Reality: Schelling on Contraction and Creation
Clara Berg 52

Recensioner 66

Jean-Luc Marion. *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere: A Contribution to a Critical History and a Phenomenal Concept of Revelation*
Elias Kjörk 66

Anders Gerdmar, Torbjörn Aronson & Pavel Hoffma (red.). *Bibeltro. Nio teologer om bibelsyn och bibelbruk*
Martin Bergman 67

Fredrik Santell. *Att bygga sitt liv i skuggan av kriget. Heribert Jansson, en existentiell biografi*
Lotta Knutsson. 69

Eric Metaxas. *Religionless Christianity – God's Answer to Evil*
Miriam Sünder. 71

STK Essä: Platons främling
Hans Ruin 74

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 1–6
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28852

In memoriam David Tracy (1939–2025)

WERNER G. JEANROND

Den inflytelserike amerikanske teologen David Tracy avled den 29 april 2025 i Chicago.

Tracy växte upp i Yonkers, New York, i en katolsk familj med irländskt påbrå. Han utbildades först i det lokala prästseminariet och sedan vid det Gregorianska universitetet i Rom. Han prästvigdes 1963. Efter en kort tid som kaplan i Bridgeport, Connecticut, återvände han till Rom och disputerade 1967 vid Gregorianska universitetet med en avhandling om den kanadensiske teologen Bernard Lonergan.

I Rom upplevde Tracy inte bara de spännande förberedelserna inför Andra Vatikankonciliet (1962–65) kring påven Johannes XXIII utan även stora delar av själva konciliet. Han blev vittne till den nya öppningen av katolska kyrkan mot världen, mot andra kristna kyrkor, mot andra religioner och mot nutidens samhällskultur och vetenskapliga universum. Direkt eller indirekt kom han i kontakt med de yngre och framåtblickande teologer som kom att påverka konciliets intellektuella, andliga och kyrkopolitiska agenda – däribland Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Josef Ratzinger, Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac – och deltog i debatter om kyrkans och teologins förnyelse.

Dessutom erbjöd Lonergans teologi en omfattande nyorientering av teologi som vetenskap. Lonergan utforskade både teologins historia och den nya kanon av vetenskapliga discipliner, däribland hermeneutik, som kräver en uppdaterad förståelse av uppenbarelse och en ingående teologisk metoddiskussion. Tiden i Rom blev en avgörande erfarenhet för Tracy. Han kunde med egna ögon se hur en global kyrka försökte övervinna gamla dogmatiska

hållningar och fördomar och reflektera på nytt över hur kristen tro skulle kunna förhålla sig till en pluralistisk och mångfacetterad värld.

Tracys entusiasm för kyrkans förnyelse följde med honom till hans första akademiska befattning vid Catholic University of America. Han deltog i kritiken av påven Paulus VI encyklika *Humanae vitae* (1968) som förbjöd användningen av preventivmedel för katolikerna. Universitetets ledning ansåg att kritikerna kompromitterade deras ställning som katolska teologer och avskedade dem. Tracy och kollegorna klagade på det katolska universitetets beslut i domstol och så småningom vann de. Under den tiden kallades Tracy 1969 till professorstjänsten vid University of Chicagos Divinity School. Här blev han den förste icke-protestantiska professorn i systematisk teologi. Trots flera inbjudningar till andra lärosäten stannade Tracy kvar vid Divinity School till pensioneringen och i Chicago till sin död.

Tracy ärades genom flera hedersdoktorat och valdes in i flera lärda sällskapen.

Tracys teologiska projekt

Internationellt känd blev Tracy genom boken *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (1975).[1] Boken diskuterar spektrum av teologiska metoder samt villkoren för människans varande och tänkande i en pluralistisk värld. Viktigt är Tracys utgångspunkt: Gud visar sig inte bara i kyrkan utan även i världen. Teologin kan inte undvika pluralismen varken i kyrkan eller i världen utan måste förhålla sig kritiskt och självkritiskt till denna situation och utveckla adekvata metoder. För att understryka att teologin alltid ska uppfatta sig själv *in via* – på vägen till Gud och det gudomliga mysteriet – föreslår Tracy en ”revisionistisk teologi”. Denna (olyckliga) formulering har ingenting med Trotskijs kommunism att göra, istället betonar den den alltid provisoriska pilgrim-naturen av kristet liv och tänkande. Det behövs en korrelationsteologi, alltså en konfrontation, en ömsesidig upplysning och korrektur och en möjlig försoning mellan en ny interpretation av den postmoderna självmedvetenheten och en ny interpretation av det kristna budskapet.[2]

I *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (1981) identifierar Tracy först teologins tre offentligheter, nämligen kyrka, samhälle och akademi, för att sedan fundera över vilka kriterier som skulle kunna vara vägledande för människans relation till Gud, tro, sanning och det egna mysteriösa jaget i respektive sociologiska och teologiska kon-

1 David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology,* New York: Seabury Press, 1975 (alla översättningar är mina).

2 Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order,* 32.

stellation.[3] Sedan skiljer Tracy mellan *classics* och *period pieces*, alltså mellan transformativa insikter om Gud, människans vara och universum å ena sidan, och flyktiga iakttagelser som inte kallar till att ompröva människans Guds- eller självförståelse å andra sidan. Tracys tes är ”att vad vi menar när vi kallar vissa texter, händelser, bilder, ritualer, symboler och personer ’klassiker’, är inget mindre än att vi känner igen uppenbarelsen av en verklighet som vi bara kan kalla sanning”.[4] Från den filosofiska hermeneutiken kan teologin lära sig om tolkningens möjligheter och begränsningar när vi konfronteras med annorlundaskap och radikalt annorlundaskap. Händelsen och personen Jesus Kristus utgör den kristna traditionens klassiska centrum – alltså inte en text, utan en person som kallar till en alltid bättre insikt och förståelse.

I *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (1987) fortsätter Tracy undersökningen av de utmaningar, möjligheter och risker som en teologi upplever när den tar sin hermeneutiska karaktär på allvar.[5] Allt mänskligt tänkande and tolkande är beroende av språket. ”Att förstå över huvud taget är att tolka”.[6] Den mänsklige andres annorlundaskap och den gudomlige andres radikala annorlundaskap träder fram och utmanar. Samtidigt kan annanhet och skillnad bli till genuina möjligheter: den som är annorlunda, den som skiljer sig, kan även träda fram som den möjlige. Därför krävs samtalsformer som bereder rum för argument och skilda perspektiv. Dessutom bör teologin, enligt Tracy, dra nytta av en rad postmoderna insikter rörande tolkningsproblematiker och samtalskonstellationer: språkbruket innehåller alltid maktrelationer, och kan även påverkas av systemiska förvrängningar. Vår subjektiva och intersubjektiva medvetenhet är aldrig oförmedlad, ren eller fri från tvetydigheter. Det gäller likaså för våra sätt att närma oss religionen. Därför skulle det, å ena sidan, vara naivt att tolka någon religion som en otvetydig sanningskälla. Å andra sidan skulle det vara lika fel att bara betona skillnader mellan religiösa erfarenheter och traditioner. I stället behövs ett kritiskt och självkritiskt sätt att tänka analogiskt: ”en artikulation av verkliga skillnader som genuint annorlunda men samtidigt lika det vi redan vet”.[7] Tracy skiljer mellan resonansen till religiösa klassiker hos troende och icketroende. Troende deltar i samtalet med sina religiösa klassiker för att bli förvandlade. Troende närmar sig religiösa klassiker för

3 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, London: SCM, 1981.

4 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, 108.

5 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope,* San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.

6 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 9.

7 David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity,* 93.

att bli förvandlade. Men de kan ha nytta av samtalet med icketroende som tolkar samma tradition. Tracys ömsesidigt kritiska korrelationsmetod inbegriper ett samtal mellan troende och icketroende till nytta av bägge gruppernas ansvarsfulla tolkning i mötet med genuin pluralism, annorlundaskap och radikalt annorlundaskap.

Tracys ingående intresse för dialogen med religiöst annorlunda människor är en naturlig konsekvens av hans hermeneutiska övertygelser. I två studier, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (1990) och *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church* (1994), behandlar han genuint annorlundaskap inom ramarna för religiös erfarenhet. Samtidigt överger han nu ”det klassiska” som huvudkriterium för att bedöma religiös sanning för den fragmentariska naturen hos all erfarenhet – religiös och ickereligiös.[8] Fragmentet står emot alla försök att lätt integreras i befintliga system; det bjuder motstånd mot alla totalitära strukturer. Vidare respekterar det partikulariteten och värdigheten hos den respektive andre. På så vis befriar fragmentet samtalet kring sanningens manifestation i och bortom den kristna traditionen från möjliga missbruk.

1999–2000 höll Tracy de prestigefyllda *Gifford Lectures* i Edinburgh under rubriken *This Side of God*. Han blev alltmer upptagen med möjligheterna och begränsningarna för människans tal om Gud. Tracy observerade ett skifte från den moderna debatten om Guds existens till postmoderna frågeställningar kring Guds identitet. Hur ska man ta itu med Guds radikala annanhet: Gud som den fördolde, den obegriplige, den oändlige? Den omöjlige, den som är, kärlek, treenighet? Hans sökande efter passande begrepp för att tala om Gud ledde Tracy till en ”kristomorfisk theocentrism” samt insikten om att Gud är hoppets källa. Metodologiskt innebar detta att han ville samla de fragment som finns till ett, självfallet bara provisoriskt, helhetsbegrepp. Tyvärr avslutade Tracy inte arbetet med publikationen av sina *Gifford Lectures*.

Som förberedelse för denna uteblivna publikation hade Tracy dock redan sammanställt två stora uppsatssamlingar som kom ut 2020: *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, *Selected Essays*, vol. 1 och *Filaments: Theological Profiles*, *Selected Essays*, vol. 2.[9] Som boktitlarna visar är Tracy angelägen om att undvika alla former av totalisierande teologi, alla försök

8 David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990; David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: Reflections on God, Hermeneutics, and Church*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994.

9 David Tracy, *Fragments: The Existential Situation of Our Time*, *Selected Essays*, vol. 1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020; David Tracy, *Filaments: Theological Profiles*, *Selected Essays*, vol. 2, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020.

att representera det hela. Därför använder han sig i dessa verk av uttrycket ”frag-events”.

> Teologi är ett hermeneutiskt företag och därför en offentlig teologi. I annat fall skulle teologin bekvämt dra sig tillbaka till något glatt men illusoriskt säkert andligt reservat. Uttrycket frag-event är ett sätt att framhäva den hermeneutiska uppgiften för all teologi.”[10]

Frag-event är alltså Tracys försök att närma sig gudsbegreppet utanför totaliserande begreppsligheter. I dessa essäer och i Tracys sista publikationer är det tydligt att hans föredragna begrepp för Gud är ”oändlig kärlek” [*infinite love*]. ”Bara ett begrepp som antyder ett sådant övermåttet [*excess*], den oändlige, passar för Gud.”[11]

Tracys betydelse

Tracys böcker, artiklar och akademiska undervisning kännetecknades av en självklar ekumenisk horisont. Från början av hans författarskap gällde hans blick hela spektrum av teologiska källor, metoder, traditioner och konfessioner. Han var en oerhört brett informerad och genuint interdisciplinärt tänkande teolog. I hans undervisning och handledarsamtal sade han ofta ursäktande ”som ni vet” när han framställde viktiga källor och teologer, även om hans studenter inte visste och bara häpnade över hans kunskapsnivå. Dessutom förfogade han över en djup kännedom i religionshistoria, klassisk, modern och postmodern filosofi, musik och världslitteratur. Han ville vara en genuin samtalspartner för alla som sökte sig till teologisk kunskap – utan arrogans, självmedvetenhet eller akademisk hybris. Inte undra på att hans vänskap söktes och uppskattades av många människor, även några stora samtida intellektuella profiler som till exempel Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricœur, Jacques Derrida, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Hans Joas, Hans Küng, Jean-Luc Marion, Wendy Doniger samt kollegorna i styrelsen för den internationella teologiska tidskriften CONCILIUM.

När jag 1979 kom till Chicago för att arbeta med Tracy upptäckte jag med förvåning och glädje att Tracy inte alls hade för avsikt att bilda en teologisk skola. Snarare ville han fungera som ett slags barnmorska för studenternas egna teologiska projekt, även om dessa projekt gick andra vägar eller till och med ställde sig kritikt till hans teologiska program. Som lärare var det avgörande för Tracy att man kunde argumentera för sina perspektiv och metoder

10 Tracy, *Fragments*, 15.

11 David Tracy, ”On Naming God”, *Beyond the Analogical Imagination: The Theological and Cultural Vision of David Tracy,* red. Barnabas Palfrey & Andreas S. Telser, Camebridge: Camebridge University Press, 2023, 220.

och vara beredd på att lyssna och delta i ett ömsesidigt konstruktivt-kritiskt samtal med andra. Han lärde som han själv levde.

Tracy arbetade gärna och generöst för och med alla intresserade av ett kritiskt och självkritiskt teologiskt tänkande till samhällets, akademins och kyrkans bästa. Dessutom var han trogen sitt pastorala uppdrag. Hans lördagskvällsmässor i katolska studentkyrkan besöktes av folk från alla fakulteter. Och för många studenter och kollegor var han en mycket betydelsefull andlig vägledare.

Ledande amerikanska tidningar, hemsidor ock medieföretag anser honom som den mest inflytelserike teologen i USA och hyllar hans minne. ▲

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 7–9
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28853

Ledare

Naturen och viljan till liv

CLARA BERG & ASTRID GRELZ

Viljan till liv är ett återkommande tema i post-cartesianskt tänkande. Romantiken, vitalismen och den tidiga fenomenologin är alla exempel på traditioner som drivs av en önskan att återanimera världen eller återvända till livsvärlden som en reaktion mot reduktionistiska mekanistiska förklaringsmodeller av livet och det levande. Det här numret av STK samlar föredragen från ett symposium som ägde rum den 24 oktober 2023 tillägnat naturen och viljan till liv hos Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854) och Hans Jonas (1903–1993). Symposiets syfte var att uppmärksamma en för Schelling och Jonas gemensam ambition att bevara ett naturbegrepp som varken låter sig reduceras till deterministisk logik eller ger uttryck för urskillningslös animism. Schelling, som var en central gestalt under idealismens framväxt, företräder ett levande naturbegrepp som kommit att influera stora delar av den romantiska tanke- och bildvärlden. Jonas, som skriver in sig i den fenomenologiska traditionen, formulerade i sviterna av andra världskriget en så kallad filosofisk biologi vars syfte var att motverka det västerländska tänkandets thanatocentriska karaktär. Genom parallella studier av Schellings tidiga och mellanperiodsskrifter och Jonas skyttegravsfilosofi ämnade symposiet undersöka relationen mellan fenomen som natur, liv, vilja och frihet, samt de inbördes relationerna mellan livets olika framträdelseformer.

Även om symposiet ägnades åt både Schelling och Jonas utgör Schellings tänkande den huvudsakliga utgångspunkten för detta nummer. Bidragen behandlar såväl hans naturfilosofi som mellanperiodens försök att förstå livet i skärningspunkten mellan natur, frihet och gudomlighet.

I det första bidraget ställer sig Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback frågande till huruvida en naturfilosofi som – likt den tidige Schellings – tar sin utgångspunkt i organismen verkligen har någon kritisk potential idag, i en tid då tekniken blir alltmer organisk. Ju mer tekniken efterliknar det levan-

des logik, desto mer föråldrad förefaller den antika dikotomin mellan *physis* och *techne*, liksom motsättningen mellan naturligt och mänskligt liv. Vad som gör Schellings naturfilosofi intressant idag, menar Sá Cavalcante Schuback, är emellertid inte hans sätt att förstå det levande, utan hans dynamiska förhållningssätt till relationen mellan människa och natur. I Sá Cavalcante Schubacks läsning överger Schelling sitt systematiska organismbegrepp och sina undersökningar av ”naturens liv” till förmån för en filosofi som utforskar ”livets natur”. För att illustrera hur Schelling förstår denna livets natur tar artikelförfattaren fasta på två för Schelling centrala tankefigurer. Å ena sidan, beskrivningen av det ”verkliga livet” som en flod i essän Clara. Å andra sidan, hans naturfilosofiska redogörelser för det mänskliga livet som en virvel eller ett pulserande formtagande som skänker livet en i grunden rastlös, orolig eller ångestfylld karaktär. Tillsammans visar dessa bilder hur Schelling ersätter organismens filosofi med en organisk filosofi: en ”rytmisk och pulserande förståelse av samhörigheten mellan naturens oändliga kraft och dess ändliga former” som gör hans tänkande alltjämt aktuellt.

Astrid Grelz ger sig i kast med uppgiften att diskutera huruvida, och i så fall på vilket sätt, Jonas filosofiska biologi är inspirerad av Schellings naturfilosofi. Medan tidigare forskning på fältet gärna betonat likheterna mellan de två filosoferna – till exempel att de båda tillskriver organismen en unik ontologisk funktion, och att de båda beskriver naturen som genomsyrad av en grundläggande vilja till liv – påpekar Grelz att deras olika inställning till huruvida denna vilja är utmärkande enbart för det organiska livet, eller också för det ”anorganiska”, genererar vitt skilda föreställningar om vad det innebär att leva och handla etiskt.

Ariën Voogt undersöker Schellings förståelse av frihet, individualitet och ondska med avstamp i kroppsmetaforiken i Schellings frihetsskrift. I Voogts läsning ger kroppsmetaforiken uttryck för en instrumentell syn på individen då den utmålar människan som ett medel snarare än ett mål i sig. Voogt inleder sin analys med en redogörelse för Schellings tematisering av relationen mellan Grund och natur. Därefter vänder han blicken mot frihetsbegreppet, och föreslår – fortfarande med det kroppsliga bildspråket i fokus – att det i Schellings mening inte finns något verkligt mänskligt självbestämmande i relation till den gudomliga ordningen eftersom personligheten är nära bunden till självutplåning. Så misslyckas också Schelling, i Voogts tolkning, med den i Frihetsskriften uttalade ambitionen att bryta med en förståelse av ondskan som avsaknad av det goda (*privatio boni*): Likt den radikalt självbestämmande människan har ondskan ingen plats i den organiska helheten utan betraktas, likt ett sjukt organ, som en avart som förr eller senare kommer att stötas bort av kroppen.

I numrets avslutande artikel fördjupar sig Clara Berg i Schellings livsbegrepp med utgångspunkt i hans förståelse av livet som en dynamisk process präglad av motsättningar. Mot bakgrund av Schellings influenser från kristen kabbalah och idén om *zimzum* – den gudomliga kontraktionen – utvecklar artikeln tanken om livet som kamp. Berg argumenterar för att skapelsens ursprung hos Schelling inte bör förstås som ett logiskt sammanhängande skeende, utan som förankrat i en ursprunglig vilja. Genom att läsa Schellings gudsbegrepp i relation till skapelseakten visar Berg att relationen mellan Guds kontraktion och självutgivande bör förstås som en gemensam rörelse, och Gud som det dynamiska liv som tar form i spänningen mellan motsättningar.

Sammantaget aktualiserar numret utifrån en mer eller mindre historisk horisont den filosofiska och/eller teologiska relevansen av att tänka naturen som meningsfull. I bidragen framträder perspektiv som inte bara placerar naturen i ett nytt ljus i relation till människan, utan också omförhandlar människans delaktighet i och ansvar inför naturens liv. I denna mening kan numret sägas bidra till såväl teologisk och filosofisk antropologi som till samtida ekologiskt tänkande.

På ett metodologiskt plan kan man se hur numrets tema avspeglar sig i ett för bidragen gemensamt bildspråk. Livets dynamik diskuteras av artikelförfattarna genomgående med utgångspunkt i metaforer som Schelling och Jonas hämtar från naturen: virveln, floden, pulsen, meteoren och elden. Dessa bilder fungerar inte endast illustrativt, utan öppnar för ett tänkande som varken inskränker livet till en mekanisk (eller teleologisk) process eller behandlar det som ett begrepp utan förankring i naturen.

Tack till Filip Rasmussen och Tollef Graff Hugo, båda verksamma vid MF vitenskapelig høyskole i Olso, som agerade opponenter vid symposiet. Tack även för det generösa stödet från Birgit & Sven Håkan Ohlssons stiftelse samt Makarna ingeniör Lars Henrik Fornanders fond, som gjort symposiet och föreliggande temanummer möjliga. ▲

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 10–20
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28854

The Anguish of Nature

MARCIA SÁ CAVALCANTE SCHUBACK

Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback is Professor of Philosophy, Södertörn University, Huddinge.

marcia.cavalcante@sh.se

Nature and the will to life is a topic of utmost urgency in times such as ours, times of 'planetary violence' against all forms of life: human and non-human life, natural and moral life, material and spiritual life, organic and the inorganic life; against the earth and even against the heavens. Planetary violence today knows no limits. At its core is the destruction of all limits and measures. Hubris is too kind, and even naïve, a word for addressing the vertiginous destruction of limits and measures in our times. The destruction is accomplished at a velocity and with an intensity that rivals volcanic eruptions. Indeed, fire burns everywhere: bombs, explosions; the heat of wars, devastations, invasions, occupations. Everywhere it is possible to hear 'a loud naked cry of Enough', to use the words of Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975) in the novel *Petroleum*.[1] Everywhere, an 'infinite scream (is) passing through nature!', to recall the words of Edvard Munch of his famous painting, *The Scream*. It is, in fact, uncanny to confirm that everywhere, the cybermachinery of the world makes the world more and more violently deaf to its own screams.

In the realm of the present issue on 'Nature and the Will to Life', I aim to contribute by departing from the hermeneutical situation in which this topic is addressed as an appeal to the responsibility of thought, and of a thought of responsibility for the scream of the world. Specifically, I try to show how Friedrich Schelling's philosophy leaves behind an organic view of nature despite the language of organism in his writings, and opens up for an experience of the anguish of nature which contributes, on a theoretical

1 Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Petrolio*, trans. Ann Goldstein, New York: Pantheon, 1997.

level, to the recognition of responsibility before the screams of the world, as it lays the groundwork for a critique of organistic views on the relation between man and nature.[2]

The expression 'will to life' keeps awakening one of the central problems related to modern concepts of nature, namely the limit which unites and separates human life and natural life, the human rational technical and the natural. For centuries, 'will', in the sense of intentionality and purposiveness, has been conceived of as the human second nature *par excellence*. It is because of her willing capacity, and hence her capacity to deal with the future in a certain manner – in the manner of preparing and advancing oneself towards what is not yet here, towards what does not exist but might exist – that Modernity determined the human being as the abyssal separation from and opposition to nature. For centuries of Western culture and civilization, the will has defined not only 'human' nature, but the human as non-nature, as opposed to and separated from nature. The opposition between man and nature has been known since the ancients as the opposition between discursive, philosophical rationality and nature, between technique and nature. Reason versus nature, technique versus nature: these are key oppositions in ancient views. Modernity enhances it by means of the concept of the will, a concept inherited from Christianity, upon which the notion of subjectivity is grounded. Will, self-determination, self-reflection, autonomy, freedom: these modern intertwined notions, concepts, and feelings acknowledge freedom of the will as will to freedom, as capacity to act according to purposes set solely by reason, according to ends defined entirely by human understanding, according to a self-posited, self-defined, self-determined consciousness, which defines the modern meaning of subjectivity and its modern metaphysics. The human being is hence considered as the only subject in nature; the only nature capable of thinking and acting according to purposes, since reason is understood mainly from a teleological standpoint, as a rationality based on causality, and a causality justified and legitimised solely by itself.[3] The central role of the will in the modern definition of human nature explains why it is not enough to be capable of

2 A lot has been written about Schelling's organistic view of nature and about romantic organicism. See for instance Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012; Charles I. Armstrong, *Romantic Organicism. From Idealist Origins to Ambivalent Afterlife*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Less discussed is however how Schelling's view on organism challenges rather than corroborates romantic conceptions of organic life. For a discussion about how romantic organicism contributes to contemporaneous thoughts on automation see Yuk Hui, 'Philosophy after Automation?', *Philosophy Today* 2 (2021), 217–233.

3 From a teleological standpoint, rationality is defined in terms of causality insofar as it is viewed as a movement from a cause or original (*archê*), to a finality or goal (*telos*).

technical rationality, to be the homo *technicus* in the middle of nature. Bees are also technical – and Plato and many other ancient philosophers were very aware of it. Human beings produce machines, but machines are not – at least not thus far – willing beings in the same sense as natural beings. No wonder human nature has been put in opposition to both animals and machines with the same gesture that has identified animals with machines.

Romanticism has challenged these traditional views and questioned the mechanistic separation of humans from animals and machines. With the rise of the Industrial Revolution and capitalistic modes of production, the Romantics, relying on Kant, developed an organic view of nature, aiming to reintegrate human nature into the whole of *nature* by means of art and the spirit, differentiating art and technique – opposing, above all, the modern opposition between human life and natural life. Moreover, the notion of organism as developed by romantic and idealistic philosophers aimed to challenge modern scientific views of nature deeply indebted to mechanism. It is a typical modern view, shared both by modern philosophers and scientists, that both nature and technique are deprived of subjectivity, of inner purposiveness and will. The modern concept of organism shakes this dogma, deeply rooted in the western conviction about the unique, exclusive, and outstanding place of human nature in the whole of nature.

According to Kant's philosophical definition, an organism is 'what through itself is cause and effect of itself'.[4] An organism is what forms itself by itself and not merely what moves itself by itself; it is more than pure self-motion. An organism is what forms and produces itself by itself in such a way that its parts are reciprocally dependent on each other and on the whole. A tree produces another tree: thereby, it reproduces itself as tree at the same time as it produces a new individual and unique tree. As such, the organism reveals the living identity of sameness and otherness. Kant recognises, in the second part of the Third Critique, that as organism, nature acts as if it were a subject, as if it had a self-determined will, as if it had subjective purposiveness to produce its products in the – for us unforeseen – ways that it does. The 'as if' does not deny nature's subjectivity but acknowledges that insofar as nature is the 'other' of the human – that is, the non-human – human understanding is uncapable of seizing nature's subjective purposiveness; it can only seize nature as if it acted as the human does, namely purposively, teleologically.[5]

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer & Erich Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, §64, 243.

5 This Kantian view is connected to the way Kant redefines the concept of *Bildungstrieb* in Blumenbach. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, 292.

With the exception, perhaps, of Novalis, Schelling's revolutionary views on organic nature are unique in admitting a subjectivity and a will in nature – a view that many of his contemporaries and posterior commentators associate with mysticism, paranormality, animism, and exoteric practices of spiritism. Today, Schelling's recognition of subjectivity in nature has gained a newfound relevance. In 2008, Ecuador adopted a new constitution and became the first country in the world, followed by Bolivia, to adopt a set of codified Rights of Nature. Articles 10 and 71–74 of the constitution recognize the inalienable rights of ecosystems to exist and flourish, give people authority on behalf of nature, and require the government to remedy violations of these rights. Nature, or *Pachamama* in the Quechua language, is here recognized as a subject of rights.[6]

It is remarkable, albeit rarely considered, that romantic views on the organism are deeply intertwined with the capitalistic notion of *organization*; romantic and idealistic views of processual nature share the language of juridic and bureaucratic processes, as Kafka has masterly unveiled.[7] Furthermore, the vocabulary of production contaminates romantic aesthetics and the artistic understanding of *poiesis*, the making. As Kant observes in a footnote to the *The Critique of the Power of Judgment,* natural organisms and political organization are correlated by means of analogy.[8] If, to a certain extent, it seems that we are approaching today a more Schellingian view on nature's subjectivity – herein finding the conceptual resources to problematize the centrality and supremacy of human nature in the whole of nature – this view cannot be dissociated from another view: namely, what emerges in our time as a revolutionary view of the machine. Intelligent and recursive machines, AI, are increasingly blurring the distinction between human nature and the machines. As Gilbert Simondon points out, technological devices are becoming organic and natural objects.[9] Intelligent machines

6 Nature, mother earth, is called *Pachamama* in Quechua, also meaning earth, life, harvest, farming, crops, or fertility.

7 See for instance Kafka's novels *The Castle* or *The Trial* in: *The Collected Novels of Franz Kafka*, London: Penguin, 1988.

8 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 246–247: 'One can, conversely, illuminate a certain association, though one that is encountered more in the idea than in reality, by means of an analogy with the immediate ends of nature that have been mentioned. Thus, in the case of a recently undertaken fundamental transformation of a great people into a state, the word organization has frequently been quite appropriately used for the institution of the magistracies, etc., and even of the entire body politic. For in such a whole each member should certainly be not merely a means, but at the same time also an end, and, insofar as it contributes to the possibility of the whole, its position and function should also be determined by the idea of the whole.'

9 See amongst other books by Gilbert Simondon, *Information, Technology and Media*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016.

strive to become more and more like natural objects to a point that it would be possible to recognize in them a kind of will to life which could be shared with organic beings.[10] The development of recursive machines is driven by the incentive to enable them to act according to their own will. Technical objects are becoming more and more subjects. What has previously been designated as non-human – animal nature and technique – appears today as willing subjects. It is on the basis of the concept of organism and organic nature that the limits between human life and natural-animal life, as much as between nature and technique, are blurred.

In light of these general observations regarding how artificial intelligence and recursive machines become more and more organic, it is important to ask whether the concepts of organism, organic nature, and life are really capable of providing an ethical-political response or alternative to the threats of destruction enacted by the cyberworld, if it is the organicity of these machines that destroys the very sense of the organicity of the life of nature. We could even ask if Schelling's philosophy of nature and Hans Jonas' philosophical biology have something to contribute at all, as we face the destructive power of the blurring of the limit between human and natural life accomplished in our cyberworld. In fact, we are facing here difficult aporias and ambiguities: it is the very opposition between human life and natural life, between human and nature, that is blurred when machine intelligence becomes more and more organic. The entropic character of this ambiguity is clear when considering, for example, the compelling view that only human actions can save nature, knowing that nature has been destroyed precisely by human actions.

What our hermeneutical situation shows is that every attempt to think a sort of 'political naturalism' (which might, in Heideggerian terms, argue that 'only nature can save us' – or 'God', *natura sive deus*) should depart from the aporia resulting from the blurring of the limit between nature and technique, through the limit imposed by this opposition. Indeed, the blurring of the limit that unites and separates human life/nature and natural life/nature reveals the ambiguous path of the present: on the one hand, the need to blur this limit for the sake of experiencing the belonging together of man and nature; on the other, the need to set a limit by which nature can find the right to belong to itself, and human existence can learn from what it is not, can learn to exist beyond itself, despite itself, and thereby to coexist.

10 See the special issue on 'Philosophy after Automation' in *Philosophy Today* 2 (2021), guest editor Yuk Hui.

The question that seems crucial is, hence, that of the *belonging* of human life to natural life. It is the question about the very limit, understood as the line which unites and separates at the same time human life from natural life, a line that in fact remains continuously being drawn. For this purpose, a thinking dialogue with Schelling's philosophy can bring, if not clarity, perhaps some clairvoyance.

Schelling's philosophy of nature was, as already mentioned, quite revolutionary, because he admitted subjectivity in nature. Considering that nature has a will, has subjective purposiveness, Schelling rethinks the relation of identity and difference between nature and humans, between life and human life, in a very challenging way. Human life is and is not life; it is the whole life not being the whole life. The question that arises, then, is why and how human life separates from nature, or why despite 'naturally' belonging to nature, humans separate from nature to such a degree that the human opposes nature, building a realm of interiority, extracted from nature, which becomes, for humans, pure exteriority? Sameness and otherness, interiority and exteriority: these are all concepts that arise from this abyssal separation. Schelling rethinks and even leaves behind the concept of organism, which is indeed a concept of the vital force, of the life of nature, rather than of the nature of life. The mystery of the life of nature remains for Schelling the rise or emergency of singularity, which is for him the emergence of lines of limit, of lines of finitude from out of infinite life. Leibniz' metaphysical question: 'why is there something and not nothing?'[11] is rephrased in Schelling's thought into 'why is there *this* something and not nothing?', *this* something that could not be otherwise? Because Schelling thinks of singularity as limit and finitude emerging from unlimitedness and infinitude, and this emergence as the very life of nature and the nature of life. He does not rely in dialectics; there is, in fact, no opposition between finitude and infinitude, limit and unlimitedness, there is merely a *belonging* together which Schelling thinks of rather in terms of rhythm and pulsation, one being already the other, a kind of non-otherness; *non-aliud* to use a concept from Nicolaus of Cusa. Rather than speaking of organic belonging, it would be more appropriate, despite Schelling's romantic language of organism, to speak of a pulsative and rhythmic belonging. In this rhythmical and pulsative sense of emergence, what emerges is not something 'formed' within a linear development or process, but itself a 'forming', a trembling line, a whirlpool.[12] As an extension of the organicist idea of a living relation

11 G. W. Leibniz, 'Principes de la nature et de la grâce fondés en raison', § 7, *Œuvres choisies*, ed. Lucie Prenant, Paris: Garnier, 1940, 320; G. W. Leibniz, *Vernunftprinzipien der Natur und der Gnade: Monadologie*, Hamburg: Felix Mainer, 1960.

12 I thank Krystof Kasprzak for insightfully drawing attention to the importance of

between parts and a whole, when both the parts and the whole are 'alive' (meaning, forming themselves both in relation to all other parts and to the whole in vivid reciprocity), views anchored in Kant's definition, Schelling, adding to Kant a Fichtean and Spinozist perspective, inaugurates in romantic philosophy the viewpoint of the forming as whirlpool and restlessness. With another expression, he refers to this forming *while* forming as anguish or anxiety, the anguish or anxiety of life.

The expression 'anguish of life', *Angst des Lebens*, is an expression used by Schelling in the *Freedom Essay*.[13] There, he says that it is 'the anguish [fear] of life which drives man out of the centrum into which he was created'. The genitive formulation, *Angst des Lebens*, anguish 'of' life, implicates both the anguish before life and the anguish felt and experienced by life itself. To say that life is anguished, would that be a mere metaphor, a matter of speech, a figure of thought? For Schelling, not at all. Life, immemorial life, anguishes. It is not about fear, which some translations of this passage have proposed. Here the distinction made by Heidegger in *Being and Time* between anguish and fear should be kept in mind. It is about anguish, understood as becoming narrow, as straightness and tightness. Anguished, tight, narrow life: this means breathless life. This means life without spirit. The becoming narrow of immemorial life belongs to it. It is indeed the way immemorial life remains infinite and immemorial; thus, according to Schelling's philosophy of nature, expansive propagation. Immemorial life is the movement that passes through everything, being nothing, nothing that could not be otherwise. Indeed, it is the narrowness which enables the open infinity of immemorial life to become not only *something* but *this* something. 'Something' is the narrowing of the openness of a becoming: it is the tightness of the finite determination of infinite indetermination, the finite product of infinite production. Ocean reducing into straits and throats: constriction and, as rivers swim towards oceans, expansion. Infinite immemorial life lives in a way that it must narrow itself for the sake of becoming *this* individual, particular, singular, for becoming finite lives. It is by narrowing itself into infinite finite lives that infinite life infinitizes itself.

In the passage on the 'anguish of life' in the *Freedom Essay* here referred to, the word anguish does not, however, solely designate the 'organic' rela-

---

the figure of the whirlpool in Schelling's philosophy of nature, as the figure of what emerges. Hence, not a formed form but rather a forming as a whirlpool. See F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson, New York: State University of New York, 2004, 18.

13 F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt, New York: State University of New York, 2006, 47. The translators preferred 'fear' over anguish to say the German angst. I insist that anguish or anxiety are better translations.

tion between the infinite productivity of nature and the infinite finite products of nature. The anguish of life is for Schelling the driving force which expulses man from the centrum of creation, the driving force of human eccentricity. Human life is a product of nature's infinite productivity, but a product that is driven out of the circle of infinite life, becoming apart, exiled from the life of nature and the nature of life. Human finite life is eccentric, it is ex-sistence, a kind of second nature, a second life or, to recall an old expression by Aristotle, a life-room of its own. In the biological terminology inaugurated in the 18th century, it is a form of 'epigenesis', mutation, and not only transformation. As mutated life, human finite existence exists as 'anguish of life' expanding and propagating everywhere. In this sense it is in fact not a 'product', but a trembling line. Alexander von Humboldt, the famous scientific explorer and natural philosopher, deeply influenced by Schelling's dynamic account of nature, wrote once that 'the world is perfect anywhere/if human anguish has not entered there'.[14] Driving man out of the centre of creation, the anguish of life becomes a life of its own, becomes a life in anguish, the shaking lines of a whirlpool. What could be called 'Schelling's existentialism' is not about throwing existential categories over natural life or the other way around, but rather about the difficult question of the birth or becoming of consciousness in the world of nature, about the emergence of a form of life capable of abandoning life, of exceeding and destroying it, of living without life and de-naturating nature, aiming to destroy creation through the creation of so many forms of destruction, therefore existing as thrown in openness, as trembling line, as a drawing.

For Schelling, the 'anguish of life', life's infinite finitization, has human finite existence as its scene. Anguish is a vibrating vestige of the whole of nature in human nature, indeed the vestige of how the whole, understood as a process of infinitization, remains or rests vividly in finitude: human existence, says Schelling, is the 'veil of melancholy that is spread over all nature, the deep indestructible melancholy of all life';[15] a rest or remnant of the infinite pulsating in finite existence.

Infinite has for Schelling the verbal meaning of infinitization, as defined in the *Erlanger Vorlesungen* from 1821/22, with the formulation 'which goes through all things and is nothing, namely, to be nothing such that it could always be otherwise'.[16] In this sense, it is spirit, the breath of life, passing and

14 Alexander von Humboldt, *Views of Nature*, paperback ed., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016.

15 The translator used 'dejection' for melancholy, but in Schelling's original we read Schwermut: 'der Schleier der Schwermut, der über die ganze Natur ausgebreitet ist, die tiefe unzerstörliche Melancholie alles Lebens'. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 62–63.

16 Originally 'durch alles durchgehen und nichts seyn, nämlich nichts so seyn, daß

circulating transitively, everything, everywhere. The bond of spiritual infinity and material finitude is a huge theme not only in Schelling's philosophical thought but in all romantic and idealistic philosophies. In the beautiful dialogue *Clara*, written during 1810–11,[17] Schelling challenges the common way of thinking, since the dialogue is not only about the bond between nature and spirit, but about the bond, tie, ribbon, between nature and the world of spirits in plural. In this dialogue, which is also a dialogue about what constitutes a philosophical dialogue, a dialogue which is also a critique of the artificiality of philosophical language, Schelling relays, through Clara, a history of the philosophical loss of the bond to nature when in Modernity metaphysics turns into hyperphysics when nature is rendered as an object for appropriation – both economic-politically (for instance, in John Locke's philosophical writings on private property) and scientifically – and when, facing modern man's hatred and fear of nature, philosophy, due to this horror, becomes a 'void space', dissolved in pure subjectivity, a bodyless and de-naturated philosophy. The dialogue reflects on how the denaturation of nature is connected to understanding nature as mere productive force, and the spirit, *qua* human existence, as bodyless subjectivity, disembodied consciousness, detached from the sensual world. That is what made possible that 'today', recalling the beginning of the dialogue, 'the true ruins are not those of ancient human splendor that the curious seek out in the Persian or Indian deserts; the whole Earth is One great ruin, where animals live as ghosts and men as spirits and where many hidden powers and treasures are locked away as if by an invisible strength or by a magician's spell'.[18] *Clara* sets out a path from the understanding of nature as hyperphysis – pure exterior object of appropriation – to an understanding of how nature is in the spirits, in the plurality of spirits, which includes disembodied lives. There is a doubleness of meaning to the word spirit in the dialogue. On the one hand, it denotes disembodied modern human existence: walking in the large ruin of the earth, sharing this ruin with the ghosts of animals and of animality. On the other hand, the spirits are the dead, those who have left the world, witnessing in their absence the transitivity and transitiveness of life. These two extremes of the spirit – the unmeasured appropriation of nature (which denaturates it) and the measure of detachment of life and of the body which renders life more alive, when assuming its infinite finitude (life as a passing through everything which is nothing, nothing that could not be otherwise)

---

es nicht auch anders seyn könnte'. F. W. J. Schelling, *Initia Philosophiae Universae: Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/1821*, Bonn: Bouvier, 1969, 10.

17 F. W. J. Schelling, *Clara or, on Nature's Connection with the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp, New York: State University of New York, 2002.

18 Schelling, *Clara*, 43.

– these two extremes add a sense of *not being* which, far from negation or lack, turns the philosophical attention towards the 'there is being'. In other words, it turns the philosophical attention to the *daß* of Being, to *quoddity* (away from what something is, from *quiddity*) and thereby to another sense of temporality, in the attempt to seize the forming *while* forming, the happening *while* happening.

In *Clara*, we can read that '… any knowledge that doesn't develop purely from what is present and real is one that is superficial and that has to lead to fanciful imagination and error'.[19] *Clara*, a dialogue about clairvoyance into the deep mystery of afterlife, which dares to speak of spirits in the plural, of invisibilities, traces, and vestiges, of the nocturnal realm of death and disappearance, assumes as its starting point the urgency to depart from 'what is present and real'. This short phrase conveys that it is the present and real, the actual, and its visibility which present a philosophical task, the task to show the invisible trembling lines of past and future, of no longer and not yet, of the energy of the spirits, of the unknown touching the unknowable. It is finitude that unveils the infinite lines of life. In the same dialogue, real life [*wirkliches Leben*] is pictured as a river, which, I quote, 'draws our imagination along with it into unrestricted bounds, as into a distant future'.[20] As a river in a landscape, the present and real, quoting further, 'becomes visible in places as if it were only a thin, silver ribbon [*Band*]'.[21] The picture of the river of the present and real awakens a different insight about the nature of the present and real. Rather than as a transition from past to future, or the blending massive light of the immediate, the river of the present and real emerges here as the trace of a tracing which draws our imaginative attention to its being traced. The river of the present and real, the river of a trace being traced, is the river of the happening while happening.

The critical potential of Schelling's philosophy of nature regarding the aporias and threats of an organicist understanding of nature is to be found in his immanent critique of organicism which deflagrates from his organic presuppositions. It is utmost actual when considering that our times of 'true ruins' expose how the organic has been thought, in fact, as 'organization', a thought that has laid the grounds for the blurring of the limits between nature and human existence to the point that the urgency to reset human life's belonging to nature can hardly be separated from the automation of nature, and hence from exacerbated appropriation of nature by the humans. The critical potential of Schelling's immanent critique of organism lies in

19 Schelling, *Clara*, 5.
20 Schelling, *Clara*, 67.
21 Schelling, *Clara*, 10.

his rhythmic and pulsative comprehension of the belonging together of the infinite force of nature and its finite forms, when he thinks of the anguish of life and nature. In this comprehension, finite life and forms are emergences, meaning trembling lines of formations. What emerges are formations rather than forms, whirlpools in the stream of life or of nature. Its decisive contribution resides in reviewing the notion of what the idealistic-romantic tradition has conceived of as organism, turning philosophical thinking towards another sense of the present, toward the is-being of what is; that is, showing how the is-being is the real bond of nature rather than with nature. ▲

SUMMARY

This paper begins by asking whether a philosophy of nature that takes the organism as its point of departure still possesses critical potential today, at a time when technology itself is becoming increasingly organic – a development that renders the classical dichotomies between physis and techne, and between natural and human life, obsolete. In spite of this development, the article makes a case for the continued relevance of F. W. J. Schelling's philosophy of nature. Specifically, it shows how Schelling, in his late works, abandons his systematic concept of the organism and his investigations into the "life of nature" in favor of a philosophy that explores the "nature of life." To elucidate this shift, the article focuses on two central figures in Schelling's thought: on the one hand, the depiction of "real life" as a river in the essay Clara; on the other hand, Schelling's differentiation of human life from the rest of nature through the figure of the whirlpool – a pulsating formation that imbues life with an intrinsically restless, unsettled, or anxious character.

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 21–35
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28855

Life at the Margins of Matter

'Circumcising' Schelling's Organicist Philosophy with Hans Jonas

ASTRID GRELZ

Astrid Grelz is a PhD student in philosophy of religion at Lund University.
astrid.grelz@ctr.lu.se

There are many affinities between Friedrich Schelling's philosophy of nature, with its winding investigations into the interplay between organic and inorganic matter, and Hans Jonas's philosophical biology, with its locos in the metabolic process of living bodies. Schelling and Jonas both treat topics such as freedom, will, origin, and continuity, and they are both advocates of what, in broad terms, could be referred to as asubjective teleology. Protocols reveal that Jonas was acquainted with Schelling's work, as he attended Heidegger's seminar on the freedom essay in Freiburg in 1927/1928.[1] When in 1971 Heidegger sent him a copy of his famous *Schelling's Abhandlung Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809)*, Jonas concedes in a return letter that Schelling's treatise 'made a deep impression' on him in his youth, although it 'gradually slipped away' from him over the years, and now promises to reread it under Heidegger's guidance.[2] Yet among the plethora of names that Jonas keeps returning to in his philosophical-biological writings (such as Spinoza and Whitehead), Schelling is conspicuous by his absence.

1 Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe. IV. Abteilung: Hinweise Und Aufzeichnungen: Seminare: Hegel – Schelling*, ed. Peter Trawny, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2011, 49–54; Peter Trawny, 'Nachwort des Herausgebers', *Seminare: Hegel – Schelling*, 895; Martin Heidegger, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar (1927/28): Die Protokolle von Martin Heideggers Seminar zu Schellings 'Freiheitsschrift' (1927/28) und die Akten des Internationalen Schelling-Tags 2006*, eds. Lore Hühn & Jörg Jantzen, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Fromman-Holzboog, 2010, 331.

2 'Ich sehe seinem Studium in einem jetzt beginnenden Urlaub mit Spannung entgegen. In meiner Jugendzeit hat Schellings Abhandlung mich einmal tief beeindruckt, ist mir aber in den langen Jahren allm[ählich] entglitten. Nun werde ich sie also unter Ihrer Führung neu lesen.' Rudolf Bultmann & Hans Jonas, *Briefwechsel mit Hans Jonas 1928–1976: mit einem Anhang anderer Zeugnisse*, ed. Andreas Grossmann, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020, 123.

Nowhere in Jonas's published works, not even in his presentation in Heidegger's Schelling seminar – which focuses instead exclusively on Augustine – does Schelling's name come up.[3] What could be the reason for this?

In a notebook found in the Hans Jonas Collection at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, in a file gathering Jonas's poems and translations from 1919 to 1926 – that is, a few years before he attended Heidegger's Schelling seminar – a brief note suggests that Jonas was reading Schelling's 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study'.[4] The note reads:

> Schelling 4. Vorlesung
> d. Vorlesungen über d. Methoden des akademischen Studiums 1802 d. Ersten Seiten lesen

This is followed by what appears to be an internal joke with his student friend Günther Anders, whom he had met in a Spranger course in Berlin in the winter of 1921/1922.[5]

> Hans Günther
> Kommanditgesellschaft auf Aktien
> Wesensontologie auf Akten

Could this ostensibly nonsensical joke – a wordplay, insinuating the existence of a stock company called 'Hans Günther partnership limited by shares, for an action-oriented ontology of essence' – give us a clue to Jonas's reception (or, as it is, non-reception) of Schelling's writings on the organism? In this article, I propose that it does. Having highlighted and discarded other possible answers to our question, I trace Jonas's persistent circumvention of Schelling's work to a disparity in their respective attitudes towards the anorganic – and, ultimately, towards action. Moreover, I argue that something is at stake in the tension between Jonas and Schelling: an issue related to suns, planets, atoms, and the fear of deep, dark waters.

---

3 Hans Jonas, 'Das Freiheitsproblem bei Augustin', later published as *Hans Jonas, Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsproblem: Ein philosophischer Beitrag zur Genesis der christlich-abendländischen Freiheitsidee*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Reprecht, 1930. Cf. Trawny, 'Nachwort des Herausgebers', *Seminare: Hegel – Schelling*, 895.

4 The Hans Jonas Collection, Leo Baeck Institute, New York, Box: 1, Folder: 17, 'Poems and Translations – Ich halte Zweisprach mit meinem Gott: ein Zyklus', 1919–1926, AR25645. F. W. J. Schelling, 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study', *The Rise of the Research University: A Sourcebook*, eds. Louis Menand, Paul Reitter, & Chad Wellmon, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, 84, .

5 Christophe David & Dirk Röpcke, 'Günther Anders, Hans Jonas et les antinomies de l'écologie politique', *Ecologie politique*, 29/2 (2004), 1, https://doi.org/10.3917/ecopo.029.0193.

The Ontological Unicity of the Organism

A central aim of Jonas's philosophical biology is to restore the distinction between organic and inorganic matter and to reaffirm the unique ontological status of organic bodies. Just as Heidegger once criticized Western metaphysics for its *Seinsvergessenheit*, Jonas accuses modern Western philosophy of having forgotten the meaning of life. In the first formal outline of his philosophical biology from 1965, he proclaims that Occidental thought fails to recognize life as something more than just the opposite of death; that is, as equally real and equally natural as death, and not merely a temporary or accidental exception:

> [T]he lifeless has become the knowable par excellence and is for that reason also considered the true and only foundation of reality. It is the 'natural' as well as the original state of things. Not only in terms of relative quantity but also in terms of ontological genuineness, non-life is the rule, life the puzzling exception in physical existence.[6]

In response to this poor understanding of life, which he partly attributes to Descartes and Hume, and partly to Darwin, Jonas outlines a philosophical biology centred on the unique prerequisites of the organic body.[7] As critical as he is of Cartesian dualism (later reinforced by what he calls Hume's 'de-casualization' of life, and Darwin's 'complete extrusion of teleology from nature'), he is equally critical of both idealist and materialist accounts of life, none of which, in Jonas's estimation, succeed in untying the dualistic knot.[8] As for animistic or 'panvitalistic' philosophy that advocates a return to pre-Cartesian monism, there is simply 'no returning to this', in Jonas's view: no monism that can 'undo the polarity'.[9] Accordingly, a possible explanation for Jonas's neglect of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is that he dis-

6 Hans Jonas, 'Life, Death, and the Body in the Theory of Being', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 19/1 (1965), 6.

7 See, e.g., Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001, 6: '[T]he organic body signifies the latent crisis of every known ontology and the criterion of any future one which will be able to come forward as a science'. Cf. Jonas, 'Life, Death, and the Body in the Theory of Being', 15, 22. For Jonas's critique of Hume, see Hans Jonas, 'Causality and Perception', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 47/11 (1950), 319–24.

8 Jonas, 'Life, Death, and the Body in the Theory of Being', 22: 'Materialism and idealism, each from its end, try to smooth it out but get caught in it. The central position of the problem of life means not only that it must be accorded a decisive voice in judging any given ontology but also that any treatment of itself must summon the whole of ontology.'

9 'There is no returning to this: dualism has not been an arbitrary invention, for the two-ness which it asserts is grounded in reality itself. A new, integral, i.e., philosophical monism cannot undo the polarity: it must absorb it into a higher unity of existence from which the opposites issue as faces of its being or phases of its becoming. It must take up

cards it as abstract and panvitalistic – as a system that fails to recognize the uniqueness of organic bodies.

To be sure, rejecting Schelling on such grounds would would be possible only on the basis of a highly reductive interpretation of his work. While Schelling indeed holds that the whole of nature, and not just organic life, is in some sense animated, he is neither an idealist nor a monist pure and simple – and the pantheistic tendencies encountered in his thought are far from as simplistic as the pre-dualistic animism that is the object of Jonas's critique. When, in his *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (division 3.II), Schelling sets out to deduct the organic function from the concept of excitability, he does, *de facto*, distinguish between the forces at play in organic matter, and those at play in all matter – that is, between life and nature, respectively – describing the former as a 'whirlpool' in the 'stream' of the latter.[10] Moreover, the critique he levels here on the one hand to voices reducing the organism into chemical physiology, thereby depriving it of its subjective agency, and on the other, to any vitalist account 'that posits in the organism an absolute activity' or 'life force' (conversely depriving it of its unique receptivity), ultimately leads him to a third, synthesizing definition of the organism that comes remarkably close to Jonas's.[11]

At the heart of Jonas's theory resides the stipulation of life as metabolism imbued with a fundamental claim to remain.[12] This grants him something of a middle position between German 19th century biology, which emphasizes the spatial or environmental nature of the living (specifically, the way the unity [*Ganzheit*] of a living being is continuously formed in relation to its environment [*Umwelt*], and of the various vitalistic currents that promote a dynamically oriented concept of life (accentuating its teleological character). In Jonas's philosophical interpretation, the metabolic process combines a geometrical ideal with a teleological pattern of causality, causing the organism to change while retaining its identity.[13]

---

the problem which originally gave rise to dualism.' Jonas, 'Life, Death, and the Body in the Theory of Being', 13.

10 Cf. F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004, 113. '[A] stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance – a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly trans- forming – but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus no product in nature is fixed, but it is reproduced at each instant through the force of nature entire.' Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 18.

11 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 60–63.

12 Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 4.

13 That is, an idea for which modern science, in Jonas's interpretation, has no room. Jonas, 'Organism and Freedom. An Essay in Philosophical Biology', 29.

Schelling also finds that the activity of the organism is determined by its receptivity, and that its receptivity is conditioned by its activity.[14] In the first part of section 3.II, he describes the excitation of the organism as the result of a continuous struggle with its surroundings to remain alive – a struggle through which the organism dissociates itself from an-organic nature. 'The whole mystery' of life, in Schelling's meaning, 'rests on the opposition between inner and outer', between irritability and susceptibility; this 'must be admitted if one admits anything individual in Nature at all'.[15]

Next, he shows how this dual activity is inextricably bound to the form of the organism, being that through which the organism individuates from the whole:

> The organic shape and structure is the single form in which the inner activity can assert itself against the outer, e.g., the form to which also belongs the manifoldness of individual organs, each of which adopts its particular function. […] The beginning of life is activity; it is a tearing loose from universal Nature. But that activity is itself again receptivity, for receptivity is only the minus of activity.[16]

Combining these arguments, what emerges here is a dual gesture of propulsiveness and self-individuation more or less identical to the one that Jonas attributes to the living: a continuous process through which the living keeps alive, in movement, ever changing, yet separate.[17]

This affinity has not gone unnoticed in previous research. In her 2020 article 'The Paradox of the Living: Jonas and Schelling on the Organism's Autonomy', Francesca Michelini argues that Schelling's incessant insistence on the complex and unique function of the organism is likely to have appealed to Jonas.[18] In slightly bolder terms, Philipp Höfele maintains that *The Phe-*

---

14 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 61f: 'The proposition: The receptivity of the organism is determined by its activity is, therefore, the principle of a physiological immaterialism.'

15 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 64.

16 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 64f.

17 Cf. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 75f.

18 'At variance with physiological materialism, which takes life merely as chemical process, and at variance with physiological idealism, which takes it instead as absolute activity and subject, Schelling draws emphasis on the fact that the organism is an activity that combines both sides, that means a productive product, a subject-object. This latter point is for our purposes undoubtedly the most insightful and interesting among Schelling's bio-philosophical remarks, as its message is one Jonas could have easily looked upon with favor.' Francesca Michelini, 'The Paradox of the Living: Jonas and Schelling on the Organism's Autonomy', *Rivista Di Estetica* 74 (2020), 20, https://doi.org/10.4000/estetica.7101.

nomenon of Life exhibits 'traces' of Schelling's philosophy.[19] Jesper Lundsfryd Rasmussen advocates the reception of Jonas as an autonomous 'co-poet' (*Mitdichter*) of Schelling.[20] Lore Hühn and Jörg Jantzen, in the preamble of their 2010 edition of Heidegger's Shelling Seminar, goes so far as to suggest that Jonas's philosophical biology heavily relies on Schelling's groundwork:

> The line of tradition of modern natural ethics and critique of technology that originates from Schelling, extends through Heidegger, and is mediated by the latter to his students Hans Jonas, Hannah Arendt and Günther Anders, only to find its ultimate actualization in modern natural ethics today, has hardly been taken note of. / It is especially noticeable that essential aspects of Jonasian ethics of responsibility, such as his critique of classical metaphysics' forgetfulness of the body and nature, cannot be understood without the Schellingian background […].[21]

In summary, Jonas's *Schellingsvergessenheit* could stem from the impression that Schelling's philosophy of nature is panvitalistic; yet a closer analysis reveals that such a reading cannot be sustained. In fact, as Michellini, Höfele, Rasmussen, Hühn, and Jantzen have argued, Schelling's account of organic nature – in linking the complexity of life forms to the complexity of their bodily organization – fits the descripition of what Jonas yields as 'an

19 Philipp Höfele, 'Becoming as Formation of Boundaries: Schelling's Philosophy of Nature and Whitehead's Process Philosophy', *Kabiri* 4 (2024), 23.

20 Rasmussen primarily stresses a methodological kinship, arguing that Jonas and Schelling both 'read the philosophy of nature […] through a mythological lens', this being 'a scientific and rational myth, where freedom is the central vehicle'. Jesper Lundsfryd Rasmussen, 'Freedom as Ariadne's Thread Through the Interpretation of Life: Schelling & Jonas on Philosophy of Nature as the Art of Interpretation', *Kabiri* 1 (2018), 91. He presents an affiliated thesis in *Res Cogitans* in 2016, arguing, following Robert Spaemann and Reinhard Löw, that 'Schelling's problem area and early philosophy find a representative in Jonas' philosophy', i.e., that 'parallel movements of thought' can be found between the two, although Schelling 'only *incognito* can be can be found in Jonas's environment' (my transl.). Jesper Lundsfryd Rasmussen, 'Hans Jonas' Philsophische Biologie und Friedrich W. J. Schelling's Naturphilosophie. Einleitende Bemerkungen zu einer Affinität', *Res Cogitans* 11/1 (2016), 63, 67, 86, https://doi.org/10.7146/rc.11127246; cf. Robert Spaemann & Reinhard Löw, *Die Frage Wozu? Geschichte und Wiederentdeckung des teleologischen Denkens*, München: R. Piper & Co., 1981, 139, n. 75.

21 Hühn & Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar (1927/28)*, 35f (my transl.). Cf. Lore Hühn, 'A Philosophical Dialogue Between Heidegger and Schelling', *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 6/1 (2014), 29f, https://doi.org/10.1179/1757063814z.00000000029; Lore Hühn, 'Ekstase und Gelassenheit: Schelling und Heidegger im Gespräch', *Journal of the Faculty of Letters, the University of Tokyo, Aesthetics* 42–43(2018), 32.

organistic philosophy proper', as such anticipating his own philosophical enterprise.[22]

Asubjective Teleology

A second possibility, which is closely related to the first, is that Jonas's understanding of the teleological element of life diverges from the teleology inherent in Schelling's philosophy of nature. This is undoubtedly true, inasmuch as Jonas and Schelling operate with distinct definitions of freedom and will. For Schelling, original freedom *qua* necessity pertains to nature in its totality – as such, to be regarded as a self-differentiating cosmological principle.[23] For Jonas, original freedom is the same as metabolism, rather designating a self-differentiating physical process.[24]

Furthermore, the teleology implicit in Schelling's concept of nature is characterized by an essentially positive propulsiveness or force that is absent in Jonas's. Schelling speaks of nature as a stream, law, force, or longing, whereas Jonas's teleology is of a different sort: the most minimal teleology imaginable, namely, the urge of persisting in being.[25] No growth, no domination, or positive goal motivates Jonas's organism – not even force or strength. Rather, the claim to remain is a plea not to perish, imbuing the organism solely with vulnerability by making it a potential victim of violation.[26]

---

22 Hans Jonas, 'Spinoza and the Theory of Organism', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3/1 (1965), 50ff, 55ff. Jonas explicitly writes that Spinoza shows an 'insight into the essentially dual character of the organism: its autonomy for itself, and its openness for the world: spontaneity paired with receptivity' in a way that 'neither Descartes before him nor Leibniz after him did'. Cf. Hans Jonas, 'Parallelism and Complementarity: The Psycho-Physical Problem in Spinoza and in the Succession of Niels Bohr', *Spinoza and the Sciences*, eds. Marjorie Grene & Debra Nails, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1986, 237–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-4514-2_10.

23 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 14.

24 Hans Jonas, 'Organism and Freedom. An Essay in Philosophical Biology', *Hans Jonas. Kritischen Gesamtausgabe, Bd. I.1*, eds. Jens Ole Beckers & Florian Preußger, Berlin: Rombach, 2009, 1.

25 True, Jonas speaks in 'Mortality and Morality' of a 'waiting' or 'yearning' of substance – a 'secret teleology […] in the colossal predominance of mechanical contingency in the cosmic prehistory of life' – yet he is careful to emphasize that such speculations 'do not step beyond the limits of an immanent philosophy of nature. No "seeing" intelligence at the beginning, no eternal providence concerning what ultimately comes to fruition, need be assumed. Unconscious tendency suffices for the evidence of life. […] In a word, the testimony of life, immeasurably meaningful for ontology, is still a voice of immanence concerning itself'. Hans Jonas, 'Mortality and Morality: A Search for Good after Auschwitz', Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996.

26 Cf. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 4: 'With this twin aspect of metabolism – its power and its need – not-being made its appearance in the world as an alternative embodied in the being itself; and thereby being itself first assumes an emphatic sense: intrinsically qualified by the threat of its negative it must affirm itself, and existence affirmed is existence as a concern. So constitutive for life is the possibility of not-being that its very being is essentially

Nonetheless, Schelling and Jonas share the same incitive, namely the recovery of an asubjective notion of freedom that was lost with the emergence of the mechanistic worldview. Again, Hühn and Jantzen finds that Jonas's debt to Schelling in this area is evident, especially in his late writings on theology and ethics. Jonas's concept of God, and his theory of responsibility, both rely on a strikingly Schellingesque theory 'whose anti-Kantian point, as is well known, lies in the fact that it does not tie purposes solely to human rationality'.[27] Like Schelling, Jonas breaks with the Western metaphysical obsession with human will – not by abolishing teleology, but by ridding the notions of freedom and will of their anthropological content.[28]

Moreover, the way in which Schelling's universal teleology comes to expression specifically in the organism is not too different from Jonas's minimal teleology. Whereas Schelling never explicitly discusses metabolism, he keeps returning to the closely related physiological phenomena of 'combustion': 'The major processes of Nature are combustion and decombustion processes, in the great – (therefore, the opposition between sun and planets) – as in the small.'[29] He further acknowledges that substance exchange occurs differently in a thing than in a living being. Whether used as its own energy reserve for preserving, increasing, or moving itself 'like the mobile, growing flame' (animals), or returned to the atmosphere (plants), it is clear to Schelling that the organism alone has the ability to buffer the energy released from combustion.[30] This explains why the *Stoffwechsel* of the organism, the continuous exchange of its own constituents, has no or little effect on its form: Ultimately, the organism can 'rest in activity'.[31]

In conclusion: while, from Jonas's perspective, Schelling is mistaken in attributing original freedom to all of nature and not just the living (thereby

---

a hovering over this abyss, a skirting of its brink: thus being itself has become a constant possibility rather than a given state, ever anew to be laid hold of in opposition to its ever-present contrary, not-being, which will inevitably engulf it in the end.' Renaud Barbaras has criticized this dimension of Jonas's philosophical biology for wrongfully defining the living being by its 'struggle for survival'. Renaud Barbaras, *Introduction to a Phenomenology of Life*, trans. Leonard Lawlor, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022, 352, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv21ptrzf. Whether the fear of no longer being can be equated with a survival instinct is, however, debatable.

27 Hühn and Jantzen, *Heideggers Schelling-Seminar (1927/28)*, 35f. For a more nuanced discussion of whether Kant really 'tie purposes solely to human rationality', see, e.g., Philippe. Huneman, *Understanding Purpose: Kant and the Philosophy of Biology*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781580466950

28 Cf. Hühn, 'A Philosophical Dialogue Between Heidegger and Schelling', 30.

29 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 59. The term metabolism was popularized by the German physiologist Theodore Schwann only in 1839. D. Fraser Harris, 'The Date of the Introduction of the Term "Metabolic"', *Nature* 98 (1917), 389f.

30 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 59.

31 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 120.

detaching it from its very root in organic bodies)[32] – and although Schelling's teleology (both of nature in general and the organism in particular) comes down to force, whereas Jonas's teleology comes down to vulnerability – Jonas and Schelling both conceive original freedom as substance exchange, and both hold that the organism is determined through the specific kind of substance exchange that makes it capable of resting in activity. Again, their disparities in this area are not sufficient to explain why Jonas refrains from discussing Schelling's work. Rather, their shared views on the topic support the thesis put forward by Michellini, Höfele, Rasmussen, Hühn, and Jantzen: that is, that Jonas philosophical biology may be directly or indirectly influenced by Schelling's philosophy of nature.

The Anorganic

This brings us to the third, and, as I would like to suggest, most plausible reason for Jonas's evasion of Schelling: namely, their different attitudes towards the anorganic. This calls for a brief recourse to Jonas's notebook from the early 1920s, and the work on which the note supposedly comments.

In the first pages of 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study' – fourteen lectures held at the University of Jena in the summer of 1802 – Schelling discusses the role of philosophy in the academy in light of the famous conflict of the faculties in German universities. Between the 'higher', practically oriented faculties, that have an unmistakable societal function (theology, law, and medicine), and the 'lower' faculties, supposedly targeting individual intellect and creativity (philosophy and the arts), Schelling argues in favor of the lower faculties, emphasizing the importance of a universal perspective on science, which only philosophy and the arts can provide. A science unable to relate to the whole, writes Schelling, is devoid of reality and meaning, and like 'dead matter' it 'will sooner or later be expelled'.[33] Accordingly, the role of the scientist, as that of all men, is to make the ideal unfold in the real by gaining knowledge of the absolute. The rational human being is, in Schelling's words, 'placed into the world to supplement [the] becoming [of nature]: what is lacking in the totality of God's revelation should unfold from him and from his activity' (activity defined here as '[t]he one and only

32 Cf. Höfele's reading of Jonas's critique of Whitehead's process philosophy in *The Phenomenon of Life* as an implicit critique of Schelling. In Höfele's opinion, however, Schelling's 'process-philosophical perspective on the whole of being', that is rejected by Jonas, is 'justified from certain points of view, especially in view of a holism increasingly discussed in the Anthropocene', because '[t]o speak with Schelling: if everything is an expression of an "eternal freedom", it also participates in the value of that freedom'. Höfele, 'Becoming as Formation of Boundaries', 24–27, 33.

33 Schelling, 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study', 90.

action of originary knowledge').[34] In other words, there is no true action that 'does not express […] the divine being within it'.[35] All action except for knowledge of the absolute and mediation of the original freedom of nature (which is the same as absolute necessity) is, in Schelling's view, untrue. In a few concise lines, he proclaims that:

> Those who cannot grasp the meaning of the absolute unity of knowledge and action raise such vulgar objections as: if knowledge were one with action, action would always follow from knowledge; but it is perfectly possible to know what is right and fail to do it; and so on.[36]

> Action! Action! is the call that rings out from all sides. But it resounds the loudest from those who would prefer not to proceed with knowledge.[37]

What, then – to bring the argument together – does this have to do with organistic philosophy? The answer, I propose, lies in the different attitudes of Schelling and Jonas towards the anorganic: for while both define the organism in terms of self-individuation, they diverge in how they understand that from which life continues to individuate.

For Schelling, as shown above, the anorganic world is no less animated than the organic: an ideal force and not just the interplay between mechanical laws and accidents determines the route of nature. This ideal force is also the cause of life:

> [T]he organism cannot be subordinated to the anorganic. Therefore, [the cause of life] must fall within a sphere that once more comprehends organism and mechanism (both opposed principles) under itself and that is higher than both. That higher sphere is none other than Nature itself insofar as it is thought as absolutely unconditioned (as absolutely organic).[38]

---

34 Schelling, 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study', 91f.

35 Schelling, 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study', 93.

36 Schelling, 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study', 93.

37 Schelling, 'Lectures on the Method of Academic Study', 91. In German, the quote reads: 'Handeln, Handeln! ist der Ruf, der zwar von vielen Seiten ertönt, am lautesten aber von denjenigen angestimmt wird, bei denen es mit dem Wissen nicht fort will.' F. W. J. Schelling, *Vorlesungen über die Methode (Lehrart) des akademischen Studiums*, ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt, Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2017, 12.

38 Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 116f.

That such a force, or 'higher organism', can indeed 'be derived from the conditions of an anorganic world', is indicated, writes Schelling, by evolution, but finds its utmost manifestation in primordial natural phenomena that precede light, such as gravity, magnetism, and galvanism.[39] At its earliest stages, the anorganic world – still shrouded in darkness – attracts and repulses.[40] The narrative is reminiscent of *Tehom*, the dark chaotic waters preceding creation in Genesis 1:2, organized and animated by a wind from God.[41] Gravity, for Schelling, is 'the dark ground' of light, just like nature is the dark ground of God: a ground 'inseparable, yet still distinct' from it.[42] Any deviation from this primordial dynamic of the natural world, like that of a shooting asteroid, he deems as evil – and the essence of natural evil, in turn, as 'meteoric'.[43]

For Jonas, in contrast, the suns, planets, and atoms are of insignificant interest. In *The Phenomenon of Life,* he makes it diligently clear that his world

39 That is, evolution *avant la letter*. In Schellings view, we can draw this conclusion from fact that 'that the animal and the plant, seen objectively, are really nothing other than a continual leap from the fluid into the solid form (just as all organisms are like amphibians, placed between the solid and the fluid)'. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 121.

40 '[I]n universal Nature nothing of the kind shows itself except in the phenomena of magnetism.' Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 117. See also: 'life certainly could be […] only chemical in *tendency* […] as the advocates of vital force truthfully say […] and this tendency is constantly inhibited, for which surely no vital force is required'; '*by what* it is inhibited seems to be the important question to which galvanism will give the answer'. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 110f. The anorganic world, however, lacks the organic capacity to contract and dilatate: 'the organic power of contraction – which seems to be totally and exclusively proper to organic nature, and to which nothing similar in the rest of nature can be compared'. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, 121.

41 '[T]he earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.' Gen. 1:2 (New Revised Standard Version).

42 'Since nothing is prior to, or outside of [*außer*], God, he must have the ground of his existence in himself. All philosophies say this; but they | speak of this ground as of a mere concept without making it into something real [*reell*] and actual [*wirklich*]. This ground of his existence, which God has in himself, is not God considered absolutely, that is, in so far as he exists; for it is only the ground of his existence. It [the ground] is *nature* – in God, a being indeed inseparable, yet still distinct, from him. This relation can be explained analogically through that of gravity and light in nature. Gravity precedes light as its ever dark ground, which itself is not actu [actual], and flees into the night as the light (that which exists) dawns.' F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006, 27.

43 Cf. Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, 'The Tragedy of Freedom – Some Notes on the Relation between Schelling and Kierkegaard Regarding the Tragic and the Question Concerning Human Freedom', *Kierkegaard im Kontext des deutschen Idealismus*, eds. Axel Hutter & Anders Moe Rasmussen, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014, 46, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110252798.59; Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 35, 46; F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, ed. Thomas Buchheim, Hamburg: Meiner, 1997, 38f, 51.

begins and ends with the freedom of the organism; that there is no freedom more primordial than the freedom of organic life (at least not within the framework of human understanding):

> Within the vast necessity of the physical universe a principle of freedom for the first time shines forth in the blind stirrings of primeval organic substance, a freedom foreign to suns, planets and atoms. Its original and elementary expression is metabolism.[44]

Admittedly, Jonas does speculate about the lifeless world in his essay 'Immortality and the Modern Temper' and later in *The Concept of God after Auschwitz*. Yet in his account, it remains a realm devoid of transcendence, language, meaning, and freedom:

> In the beginning, for unknowable reasons, the ground of being, or the Divine, chose to give itself over to the chance and risk and endless variety of becoming. And wholly so: entering into the adventure of space and time, the deity held back nothing of itself: no uncommitted or unimpaired part remained to direct, correct, and ultimately guarantee the devious working-out of its destiny in creation. […] And for aeons his cause is safe in the slow hands of cosmic chance and probability – while all the time we may surmise a patient memory of the gyrations of matter to accumulate into an ever more expectant accompaniment of eternity to the labors of time – a hesitant emergence of transcendence from the opaqueness of immanence. And then the first stirring of life – a new language of the world: and with it a tremendous quickening of concern in the eternal realm and a sudden leap in its growth toward recovery of its plenitude.[45]

Following this cosmogonic approach, the dark waters preceding Genesis enclose the whole anorganic, mechanical universe, planets and suns included. In this sense, Jonas's thought can be diagnosed with what the Swedish Romantic philosopher Benjamin Höijer once referred to as 'hydrophobia': a fear of contact with the waters and depths of the absolute.[46] Jonas leaves

---

44 Hans Jonas, 'Organism and Freedom. An Essay in Philosophical Biology', *Hans Jonas. Kritischen Gesamtausgabe, Bd. I.1*, 1.

45 Hans Jonas, 'Immortality and the Modern Temper: The Ingersoll Lecture, 1961', *The Harvard Theological Review*, 55/1 (1962), 13f; Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 275; Hans Jonas, 'The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice', *The Journal of Religion*, 67/1 (1987), 4.

46 Cf. Mats Dahllöv, *Det Absoluta och det gemensamma: Benjamin Höijers konstfilosofi*, Stockholm: Thales, 2022, 108; Benjamin Höijer, *Filosofiska Föreläsningar 1806–1812*, ed. Birger Liljekrantz, Lund: Gleerup, 1931, 76. Indeed, Jonas does write about the importance to 'take

prime matter aside and, in doing so, avoids any universalistic claims about creation. But he also faces difficulty in explaining the spontaneous movement of an inorganic entity, such as a meteor shaking the ground – ultimately rendering natural evil meaningless.

By extension, I suggest, this disparity leads them to develop incompatible attitudes to the relationship between being, thinking, and acting. For Schelling, being is will, and will is being, and the only true act is the act of nature: the necessity of original freedom in the continuous self-differentiation and self-organization of the dark anarchic ground (the uni-verse).[47] For Jonas, action entails breaking loose from, or rising above, the laws at work in the depths of the anorganic.

Consequently, their different demarcations of the propulsivleness of nature – commonly addressed by the Greeks as *physis* [φύσις] – have an immediate impact on their respective attitudes towards the relationship between philosophy and action.[48] Schelling conceives of *physis* partially as the continuous formation of the universe and partially as primordial intentionality, which entails that the knowledge and mediation of the absolute (characteristic of philosophizing) is regarded as the most virtuous activity there is: entering into the freedom of the whole. Jonas interprets *physis* on the one hand as the original freedom of organic beings and, on the other hand, as the source of their vulnerability. This entails that action begins where the absolute ends and makes responsible action tantamount to a concern for the living.[49]

Conclusion

Admittedly, the excerpt from Jonas' notebook is by no means unambiguous, and an inside joke between student friends is in no way a philosophical man-

---

the plunge into deep water' in *Materie, Geist, und Schöpfung*, albeit by this he means to refrain from universalizing models and to have the courage to speculate. Hans Jonas, *Materie, Geist und Schöpfung: kosmologischer Befund und kosmogonische Vermutung* (1988), 64.

47 'In the final and highest judgment, there is no other Being than will. Will is primal Being [Ur- sein].' Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 21. Cf. e.g., 'After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order'; 'Without this preceding darkness creatures have no reality; darkness is their necessary inheritance'; 'the yearning, which as the still dark ground is the first stirring of divine existence'. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 29f.

48 For a thorough investigation of the various definitions of φύσις in Greek philosophy, see e.g. Gerard Naddaf (ed.), *The Greek Concept of Nature*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780791483671.

49 Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

ifest. Yet in my interpretation, Jonas's scribble testifies to the fact that the young Jewish phenomenologists Jonas and Anders were hardly impressed by Schelling's Augustinian view of the task of philosophy as 'knowledge and mediation of the absolute', and of *Gelassenheit* as the highest virtue. Rather, they identify with the, in Schelling's eyes, 'vulgar' and 'ignorant' crowd calling out for action: 'Hans Günther. Kommanditgesellschaft auf Aktien, Wesensontologie auf Akten.' This positioning rhymes well with Jonas's choice, in Heidegger's Schelling seminar, to write his report on the problem of freedom in Augustine: Schelling's problem is, in Jonas's view, an Augustinian problem. In subjecting the freedom of living beings to something larger than life (whether the freedom of Nature, God, or both) Schelling and Augustine alike render the liberative dimension of action insufficient. As such, the notebook entry reveals a fundamental disagreement between Schelling and Jonas – not only regarding the conflict of the faculties or the very purpose of philosophy, but also concerning how and where to set the limits of nature's original freedom.

If it is true that, like Michellini, Höfele, Rasmussen, Hühn, and Jantzen suggest, traces of Schelling's philosophy of nature are discernible in Jonas's philosophical biology, it is thus, as I would like to suggest, a 'circumcised' version of Schelling's thought. Jonas has, in the in Derridean sense of the word, circumcised Schelling's philosophy of nature: circumscribed it, and – to the extent that he at all makes use of it – imprinted it with a new tradition for which the scission between dead and living, in contrast to Schelling's dynamic whirlpool, marks the beginning of an actively caring world.[50]

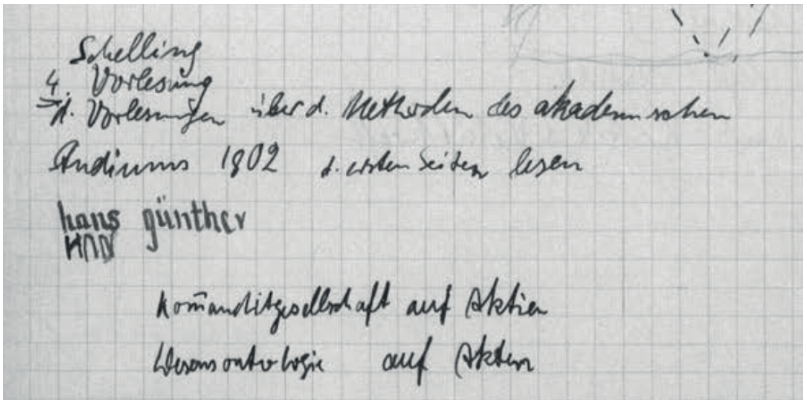

Figure 1. Jonas's notebook entry. Photo: Leo Baeck Institute, New York.

50 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, 25; Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne*, Paris: Galilée, 1995, 46f.

SUMMARY

Drawing on a playful notebook entry from Hans Jonas's student years, this article examines why Jonas consistently sidestepped Friedrich Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* in his writings on philosophical biology. It begins by outlining the many affinities between the two thinkers, as noted in previous scholarship: both articulate an asubjective teleology, both understand organisms as self-individuating unities, and both reject mechanistic reductions of life. It then considers several possible explanations for Jonas's dismissal of Schelling, arguing that their deepest point of divergence lies in their differing attitudes toward the anorganic realm. Whereas Schelling understands nature – organic and inorganic alike – as animated by a primordial, dynamic freedom, Jonas draws a sharp ontological boundary between living and nonliving matter: arguing that freedom originates only with metabolism, while the inorganic world is characterized by blind necessity and existential opacity. This split yields fundamentally different conceptions of the relationship between philosophy and nature, of action, and, ultimately, of what it means to live and act responsibly.

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 36–51
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248

DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28856

The Freedom of Organs

The Corporatism of Schelling's Freedom Essay

ARIËN VOOGT

Ariën Voogt is a PhD student in philosophical theology at the Protestant Theological University, Utrecht.

awvoogt@pthu.nl

It is common to think of the 1809 *Freedom Essay* as an attempt by Friedrich Schelling to radically rethink the freedom of the human being and the contingency of reality.[1] This text is widely viewed as marking a definitive break with Schelling's earlier philosophy of identity, or even with the project of idealism as a whole – the point at which Schelling treads new ground, following a path that leads beyond idealism, a path that will eventually lead to Nietzsche, Bergson, and Heidegger.[2] In Schelling's obscure and esoteric text, Heidegger claims that we can see the 'heat lightning of a new beginning'.[3] The *Freedom Essay* would, in this view, demonstrate the incompatibility of facticity with a rational system – in Heidegger's words, that 'positing the jointure of being as the unity of ground and existence makes a jointure of being as system impossible'.[4] Or, if we follow Habermas, Schelling presents

1 Commonly referred to as the *Freedom Essay* or *Freiheitsschrift,* the official title of the text is *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom.* For Schelling's works I refer in the following by Roman numerals to the relevant volume of K. F. A. Schelling (ed.), *Sämmtliche Werke,* Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61. In citing the *Freedom Essay* I have relied on the following translation, though not without making some changes. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love & Johannes Schmidt, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. The second page number refers to this translation.

2 This has most prominently been argued by Horst Fuhrmans in *Schellings Philosophie der Weltalter*, Düsseldorf: Swan, 1954.

3 Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985, 3.

4 Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, 161.

the 'surrender of the Absolute to history'.[5] The *Freedom Essay* owes its subversive status to an emphasis on the primordial quality of the will, the irrational Ground, the irreducible dimension of facticity and contingency, and the possibility of evil. Schelling's thinking from the *Freedom Essay* onwards is thus commonly opposed to Hegel's panlogism. In opposition to the idealist notion that all of reality and history is simply the self-mediation of the absolute Idea, Schelling would point to the inaccessible ground of all existence, which is not found in the principle of sufficient reason but in facticity and blind drives. Human freedom is seen not as rational autonomy, but as the radical capacity for evil alongside the good. In theological terms, the *Freedom Essay* would break with the pantheism of the idealist system, enabling both God's transcendence and the world's independence from God.[6]

Yet this dominant interpretation overlooks a crucial dimension of the *Freedom Essay* – its pervasive use of organic and bodily metaphors, which point in a fundamentally different direction. Schelling metaphysically conceives of individual beings as *organs* that serve a corporate whole.[7] Crucially, Schelling explains moral evil through the metaphor of disease, in the sense of organic dysfunction. Like other creatures, human beings are essentially organs that serve their purpose in the whole. Unlike other creatures, however, humans possess a freedom to deliberately put their self-interest before the interest of the whole. In the corporatist framework of the *Freedom Essay,* this capability for evil is seen as the possibility that an individual organ refuses to act in service of the whole and asserts its own life contrary to the general life of the body. Further stretching the metaphor, Schelling writes about a kind of immune response that the body exerts on the 'sick' body part. Individuals cannot dysfunction for long, and in this way the good outcome of histo-

5 Jürgen Habermas, 'Dialektischer Idealismus im Übergang zum Materialismus – Geschichtsphilosophische Folgerungen aus Schellings Idee einer Contraction Gottes', *Theorie und Praxis*, London: Heinemann, 1974, 194.

6 A small sample of interpretations along these lines: Ryôsuke Ohashi, 'Der Ungrund und das System', *F.W.J. Schelling: Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, eds. Otfried Höffe & Annemarie Pieper, Berlin: Akademie, 1995, https://doi.org/10.1524/9783050050430.235; G. Anthony Bruno, 'Schelling on the Unconditioned Condition of the World', *Schellings Freiheitsschrift – Methode, System, Kritik*, eds. Thomas Buchheim, Thomas Frisch & Nora C. Wachsmann,Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021; Andrew Bowie, 'Nature and Freedom in Schelling and Adorno', *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, ed. Lara Ostaric, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139093569.011. Slavoj Žižek describes the interpretation of Schelling's 'philosophy of finitude-temporality-contingency' in opposition to Hegel's absolute Idealism as a prevailing *doxa* or even cliché. Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters*, London: Verso, 1996, 5–6.

7 I use 'corporatism' and 'corporatist' throughout this paper in their etymological sense, derived from *corpus* (body), to designate Schelling's framework in which individuals are conceived as organs serving a bodily whole. While 'corporatism' is more commonly used in a political sense, I have found it the most apt term to describe Schelling's metaphysics; 'organicism' is too generic.

ry and the vanquishing of evil is guaranteed. In Schelling's eschatological vision, all shall have become incorporated in a single, harmonious whole – becoming the embodiment of God.

In this paper, I argue that this bodily imagery should be taken seriously. Far from being mere illustrative devices, these metaphors reveal an underlying corporatist outlook – a framework that fundamentally challenges the common interpretation of the *Freedom Essay*. It calls into question the extent to which Schelling's thought allows for genuine contingency and freedom. It makes evil's actualization impossible by design, thus setting clear limits to the world's independence from God. The aim of my analysis is to demonstrate that when Schelling invokes imagery such as organs and disease, he is articulating a vision of human personhood, one that paradoxically sees its fulfilment in becoming impersonal.

To analyse this corporatist logic, I examine two key domains. In §1, I first briefly consider the realm of (non-human) nature as tied to Schelling's concept of the Ground. Whereas the primal will of the Ground seems to show a radical contingency at the heart of being, Schelling in truth presents natural life as teleologically organized into a unified whole. In §2, I turn to Schelling's conception of human freedom and personhood. A close consideration of the *Freedom Essay* and related works reveals that the radical capacity for good and evil turns out to be a decision either to function or dysfunction as an organ in the whole. This outlook implies that personal freedom and individuality are significantly curtailed or even subverted. In the conclusion (§3), I revisit the corporatist perspective of the *Freedom Essay*, considering the extent to which it subverts freedom and personhood. Despite Schelling's apparent aim to establish the possibility of radical freedom, his corporatist framework ultimately leaves no path to exercise freedom without losing it.

1. Ground and the Organization of Nature

A principle aim of Schelling's *Freedom Essay* is to overcome a one-sided idealism, which reduces reality to a logical system, flattening out life's spontaneous activity by an abstract conceptual schema. The encompassing 'system' of the *Freedom Essay* is not based on logic but rather on *life*.[8] Schelling aims to show how 'everything actual (nature, the world of things) has activity, life, and freedom as its ground'. (VII, 351/22) The central features of being are conceived in vitalistic terms as striving, will, drive. 'Will is primal being [*Wollen ist Ursein*].' (VII, 350/21) All beings are fundamentally defined by their striving and therein enjoy their freedom and self-dependence.

8 See Diogo Ferrer, *The Transformation of Reason: Studies on System, Myth, and History in German Idealism*, Leiden: Brill, 2024, 155–169, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004697836.

At the basis of reality lies what Schelling calls the dark Ground. The 'self-will' (*Eigenwille*) of individual beings stems from the blind will of the Ground itself. The blind, primal will of the Ground gives nature its dynamism, vitality, and independent life. At the same time, it is a force of contingency, opacity, and irregularity. It provides for the 'incomprehensible basis of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the Intellect but rather remains eternally in the Ground'. (VII, 360/29) Schelling thus opposes the sterile rationalism of idealist philosophy by insisting upon the chaotic, contingent, and opaque core of reality – instead of consigning it in advance to the grip of a rational order and rendering it fully transparent. Schelling argues that the autonomy of creation requires that the world must possess 'in relation to God a relatively independent principle'. (VII, 363/32) This principle is the Ground – a principle *in* God that is nonetheless distinct from Godself.[9] The Ground is conceived as the 'yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself'. (VII, 359/28–9) Hence, the blind striving of the Ground does not just stir the spontaneous self-will of creatures and the vitality of nature. To situate the world in the Ground, and not in the Idea or in God, also means firmly establishing the autonomy of the finite world and the contingency of nature.

This is only part of the story, however. In the *Freedom Essay,* nature is not just defined by unregulated self-will, but also by the regulating force of what Schelling calls the Intellect (*Verstand*), which advances the 'universal will' (*Universalwille*).[10] Considered as individuals, all creatures strive for self-preservation. Yet in this self-directed activity, they realize their natural purpose, thus contributing to the development of the whole. The self-will, though not pursuing anything other than its own self-interest, is instrumental to the project of the universal will. 'The Intellect as universal will stands against this self-will of creatures, using and subordinating the latter to itself as a mere instrument.' (VII, 363/31–2) The Intellect employs what Hegel

9 On this 'internal dualism' in God, see Friedrich Hermanni, *Die letzte Entlastung: Vollendung und Scheitern des abendländischen Theodizeeprojektes in Schellings Philosophie*, Vienna: Passagen, 1994; Thomas Buchheim, 'Einleitung', *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit und die damit zusammenhängenden Gegenstände*, ed. Thomas Buchheim, Hamburg: Meiner, 1997.

10 The concept of the universal will in the *Freedom Essay* develops notions such as the world-soul and universal organism from Schelling's earlier philosophy of nature. See Paul Franks, 'From World-Soul to Universal Organism: Maimon's Hypothesis and Schelling's Physicalization of a Platonic-Kabbalistic Concept', *Schelling's Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198812814.003.0005.

would call the 'cunning of reason', letting the self-interest of individuals 'work behind their backs' in the interest of the whole.[11]

Notwithstanding the appearance of contingency and the chaotic interplay of egotistic drives, natural life as a whole is teleologically determined. It is true that nature draws its life-force and concrete existence from the Ground. On the other hand, nature would disintegrate, would never even emerge without being organized by the Intellect. The drive of the Ground, Schelling writes, can therefore not truly be an 'independent and complete will, since the Intellect is actually the *will in the will*'. (VII, 359/28, emphasis altered). It is 'only the Intellect that develops what is hidden in this Ground and what is contained merely potentially, and raises it to actuality'. (VII, 413-4/75) It shows that the Ground is not actually independent. It is ontologically 'hampered' or 'non-accomplished', as Slavoj Žižek puts it; it has a 'pre-ontological' status.[12] The will of the Ground cannot be conceived as a fully actual, self-directing will. As we saw, it is God's longing to give birth to Godself. The Ground is simply the divine Intellect in becoming. Only when it has ascended to the level of the Intellect does it reach full independence and actuality. Not in nature proper, only in a being that transcends nature can this be achieved.

> Since selfhood is spirit, however, it is at the same time raised from the creaturely into what is above the creaturely; it is will that beholds itself in complete freedom, no longer being an instrument of the universal will working in nature, but rather above and outside of all nature. (VII, 364/33)

As *organised* by the Intellect, the self-will of creatures serves as an unwitting *organ* (instrument) of the universal will, precisely for the reason that they are fully bound to their natural drives.[13] (VII 372/40) The human being, however, a 'supernatural' being that is no longer in thrall to compulsive drives, achieves independence from the universal will.[14] It is hence the human being that becomes the focal point of the *Freedom Essay*.

---

11 For the comparison with Hegel's cunning of reason, see Hermanni, *Die letzte Entlastung*, 122.

12 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 62.

13 Schelling uses 'instrument' (*Werkzeug*) and 'organ' (*Organ*) interchangeably – '*organon*' in Greek indeed carries both meanings.

14 On freedom in nature vis-à-vis human freedom, see Naomi Fisher, 'Freedom as Productivity in Schelling's Philosophy of Nature', *Schelling's Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198812814.003.0004; Michelle Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant,*

2. The Incorporation of Personal Freedom

The dominant reading of the *Freedom Essay* is that it stands out by virtue of its defence of a radical form of human freedom. Human persons can actively choose *not* to pursue their natural end, but to defy the rational order. The human being is a fundamentally undecided being. In humans, the hierarchical relation between the self-will and the universal will is no longer naturally fixed. It is freely established by themselves. '[T]he bond of principles in him is not a necessary but rather a free one. He stands on the threshold – whatever he chooses will be his act.' (VII, 374/41) 'In the original creation, the human being is an undecided being […] only he can decide for himself.' (VII 385/50–1) Unlike other natural beings, humans can choose *evil.* As Schelling famously writes, the proper concept of human freedom is that it is a 'capacity for good and evil'. (VII, 352/23) Evil represents the fall from the divine order, by which humans corrupt themselves and corrupt all of creation.[15] Inverting the hierarchy of cosmic principles, humanity becomes the '*inverted God* [*umgekehrte Gott*]'. (VII, 390/54) Humans seemingly possess unbounded freedom and godlike independence, which establishes the human as a (potentially) rival god.

This notion lies at the heart of the traditional view of the *Freedom Essay*. While we saw that non-human nature is still organised by the Intellect, in this view the radical freedom of the human person is the lever by which Schelling unhinges the incessant progress of the divine Idea towards self-realization. The possibility of evil is ineradicably bound up with the ontological structure of reality. Whether evil rises up, or whether the good ultimately wins out, appears not to be guaranteed in advance; it would depend on the choices we make. Habermas concludes that the panorama sketched by Schelling is of 'a world that has slipped out of God's hand', a world whose fate has been handed over to humanity.[16] Human freedom means that God 'puts his own destiny on the line'.[17]

Many interpretations of the *Freedom Essay* have therefore focused on human freedom, evil, and moral responsibility. As scholars have pointed out, Schelling here breaks with the concept of freedom established by Kant, and thus escapes from the Kantian conundrum that merely a rational will that obeys the moral law would be free. Only if we are also free to *defy* the moral law, Schelling argues, can we be free at all.[18] Much of the critical discussion

---

Schelling, and Kierkegaard, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 66–104, https://doi.org/10.1093/0199289115.001.0001.

15 On Schelling's account of the Fall, see Hermanni, *Die letzte Entlastung*.

16 Habermas, 'Dialektischer Idealismus', 193.

17 Habermas, 'Dialektischer Idealismus', 189.

18 See Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 87–104; Daniel

around the *Freedom Essay* has revolved around the problems introduced by Schelling's elucidation of this concept of freedom. For instance, some have questioned whether Schelling's concept of the 'intelligible deed' – the atemporal act by which we determine our moral character – constitutes a satisfactory theory of moral freedom.[19]

Yet I want to pursue a different line of questioning. My concern does not lie with the issue of free will, imputation, or the formal aspects of moral choice, but with the substantive options that it presupposes as alternative courses of action. Is the choice for evil really a feasible one? Can we actually, not just in principle, defy God? Turning our attention now to bodily imagery in the *Freedom Essay*, we come to understand its underlying corporatist framework and the limits it imposes upon personal existence and freedom.

2.2. Evil as Disease

To explain the capacity for evil, Schelling portrays the human being as suspended between two poles: God and the Ground, the universal and the particular will, reason and inclination. (VII, 364/33, cf. VII, 458) Human persons are spiritual beings, and for this reason, they are not bound to their compulsive drives – even though as individuals they have a self-will that does not coincide with the universal will of reason. It means they are capable of abusing their freedom, and utilizing their capacity of conscious reasoning for selfish ends. This is what constitutes the possibility of evil. 'The general possibility of evil consists, as shown, in the fact that the human being, instead of making his selfhood into the basis, into an organ, can instead strive to elevate it into the dominant and total will, conversely striving to make the spiritual within himself into a means.' (VII, 389/54) Morality comes down to this basic choice: Does one become an instrument of evil, by subordinating the power of reason to one's self-interest, or does one become a functioning organ of the Intellect?

One of the main objectives of the *Freedom Essay* is to disprove the privation theory of evil that is common to much of the Western intellectual tradition. In line with this negative understanding, evil would only consist in a *lack* – a lack of consciousness or reality. Evil would result from passivity,

---

J. Smith, 'An Ethics of Temptation: Schelling's Contribution to the Freedom Controversy', *European Journal of Philosophy* vol. 29, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12601.

19 See for instance Robert Stern, 'Schelling on Freedom, Evil and Imputation: A Puzzle', *European Journal of Philosophy* vol. 31, no. 3 (2023), https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12889; Christian Iber, 'Prinzipien von Personalität in Schelling's "Freiheitsschrift"', *'Alle Persönlichkeit ruht auf einem dunkeln Grunde': Schellings Philosophie der Personalität*, eds. Thomas Buchheim & Friedrich Hermanni, Berlin: Akademie, 2004, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783050083735.119; Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 93–98.

from a failure to exercise power. The problem with this view, Schelling argues, is that it cannot explain the actual existence of evil; it only explains it away. In the essay, he sets out to establish an alternative, *positive* conception of evil. Evil is a real opposition to the good; a 'positive perversion or inversion'; it is 'disharmony, ataxia of forces', a 'false unity'. (VII, 366/35;370-1/38) In Schelling's view, the ontological character of evil corresponds to a perversion, which Schelling explains by comparing it to *disease.*

> The most fitting comparison here is offered by disease, which, as the disorder having arisen in nature through the misuse of freedom, is the true counterpart of evil or sin […] Every particular disease emerges only because that which has its freedom or life only so that it may remain in the whole strives to be for itself. (VII 366/34-5, cf. 346/18)

Fitting as the comparison may be to Schelling, the image of disease may give us reason to doubt the positive ontology of evil that Schelling aims for. If, according to Schelling's (rather odd) understanding of disease, it is the result of an individual organ 'striving to be for itself', when it only has freedom and life in the body as a whole, it is obvious that this particular organ has no long life expectancy. Not only does the organ still depend on the body for its sustenance, severely limiting its capacity for independence; but the body, according to Schelling, also has its way of dealing with rogue organs. Disease provokes an immune response, where the body feverishly turns against the sick body part. In the same way, Schelling writes, the life of the whole turns against the defiant individual and becomes a 'consuming fire'.

> For because God cannot be disturbed in his existence, much less abolished, so – in accordance with the necessary correspondence that occurs between God and his basis – precisely that radiant glimpse of life in the depths of darkness in every individual flares up in the sinner into a consuming fire, just as in a living organism a particular part or system, as soon as it has strayed from the whole, perceives the unity and cooperative effort, to which it is opposed, as fire (=fever) and ignites from an inner heat. (VII, 391/55-6)

The image of fire has a central importance in Schelling's work.[20] Schelling explains in the 1810 *Stuttgart Lectures* that fire stands for the divine impulse

20 See Kirill Chepurin, 'Indifference and the World: Schelling's Pantheism of Bliss', *Sophia* vol. 58, no. 4 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-018-0700-7.

of life; the 'soft, subdued life-flame which burns in every being'. However, when the individual is no longer subordinate to the whole, and instead of remaining a 'non-being' wants to actualize itself as 'being', the flame turns into a 'consuming fire'. Hence the 'element of fire is hostile towards the *egoity* or *selfhood* of things'. (VII, 448) Schelling also speaks of fire as God's wrath, not as a judgment external to the sin, but the sinful will itself, conceived under the aspect of its self-destruction.[21] In the *Freedom Essay,* Schelling significantly links fire to *fever* – signalling a kind of autoimmune response to malignant organs that hamper the vitality of the body as a whole.

The image of disease and fever provokes the question to what extent evil can exist as a positive force, when in truth it has a sickly and parasitical existence. As Schelling affirms, disease has no being of its own and is 'really only an illusory semblance of life and merely a meteoric appearance thereof – an oscillation between being and non-being'. 'Evil is, however, not a being, but rather a non-being that has reality only in opposition and not in itself.' (VII, 366/35;409/71) An even more fundamental question is to what extent human persons are truly free and independent, when the choice for evil provokes a cosmic immune response. As soon as individuals start to affirm their selfhood, instead of behaving as organs that only exist to serve the whole, a fever consumes them.

Scholars have recognized the peculiar incongruity of Schelling's image of disease to explain moral evil. Michelle Kosch notes that it may lead to a naturalistic understanding of evil, but she highlights the fact that it is indeed a naturalistic *metaphor* – to indicate a moral phenomenon of defiance. 'In fact what he is trying to get across in both of these metaphors [of disease and disharmony, AV] is the idea of a positive opposition of an individual, which belongs to an overarching order (the body, the piece of music) where it has a proper part to play, instead rebelling against that order in a way that distorts both itself and the whole.'[22] There is no doubt that distortion and defiance of an encompassing order is what Schelling primarily intends with the metaphor of disease. Philosophical metaphors are never *mere* metaphors, however,; they tend to lead a life of their own. As Slavoj Žižek points out, the philosophical 'content' or 'truth' in Schelling's text is so deeply intertwined with theosophical, anthropomorphic, and other 'unscientific' imagery, that it is impossible to separate the one from the other. To discard the symbolical, mythical, or metaphorical from Schelling's account means

21 See Paul Tillich, 'Mystik und Schuldbewußtsein in Schellings philosophischer Entwicklung', *Hauptwerke Vol.1: Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Gunther Wenz, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989, 93.

22 Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 100.

to discard his philosophy as such – 'there is no way of throwing out the dirty bath water without losing the baby'.[23]

I believe this is particularly true for the metaphor of disease. Disease and organic dysfunction do not just illustrate the nature of evil, they provide its ontological schema. The organic imagery is essential to how Schelling concretely conceives of evil's corruption, the sinful individual, and the response to evil. The implication is that evil has a parasitical existence; and the sinful person, perverted by evil, falls prey to annihilation by something like cosmic inflammation. This is not exactly the same as understanding evil as *privatio boni* – corrupted life or sickness is not the absence of life (viz. death), even though it is undeniably a preliminary stage thereof. Yet it does restrict the level of independence the human person is capable of. A free decision for evil means a freedom misused. It also means a freedom lost. The human being is 'capable of freedom precisely through his being-in-God'; hence, once 'fascinated' by evil, the human spirit 'soon loses its initial freedom'. (VII, 411/72;391/56)

Accomplished evil, which would consist in a successful rebellion of human selfhood and the actualization of the inverted God, is therefore never a real possibility. Schelling describes the inverted God as that being, 'which can never reach the actual from out of the potential, which never is, though ever wants to be'. (VII, 390/54) Thus, even if in the corrupt human being evil attains an apparent reality, it is never real in itself. A life corrupted by evil is only a 'false life'. (VII, 366/34). Evil has a parasitical existence. Like a virus, it tends to destroy its own host. Evil thus contains an inner contradiction: as soon as it is actualized, it falls into nothingness. (VII, 391/55)

2.3. Personhood and the Self-effacing Organ

The fact that evil can only have a parasitical existence has significant implications for how human selfhood is conceived in the *Freedom Essay*. Egoic individuality that emerges from the Ground is, as such, a natural, not an evil principle. However, the role of individual selfhood is to serve as an organ of the universal will. It must be subdued; its self-will rendered a passive instrument. 'Only selfhood that has been overcome, thus brought back from activity to potentiality, is the good.' (VII, 400/63) The individual person remains ontologically dependent on the whole. The human self can never bring the condition of its existence under its control, which is why

23 Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, 7. A similar point with respect to the image of disease in particular is made by Jochem Hennigfeld, 'Der Mensch im Absoluten System. Anthropologische Ansätze in der Philosophie Schellings', *Schellings philosophische Anthropologie*, eds. Jörg Jantzen & Peter L. Austria, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2002.

'his personhood and selfhood can never bring itself to full actuality'. (VII, 399/62) As soon as it ceases to serve and strives to dominate, selfhood loses its coherence. Citing Franz Baader, Schelling writes:

> Thus in general, selfhood, individuality is now admittedly the basis, foundation or natural center of any creature's life; but as soon as it ceases to be the serving center and enters as dominating into the periphery, it burns as the rage of Tantalus of selfishness and egoism (of ignited selfhood) in it. (VII, 367/35)

Individual selfhood can hence only continue to exist as long as it does not exist for itself, but carries out its function in the given order. As soon as it tries to be for itself, the self is doomed. The only viable option for the human person is to give up the self – even if at the same time this provokes the temptation to preserve the self and to fall into evil, as the following passage attests:

> The anxiety of life itself drives man out of the center into which he was created: for this center, as the purest essence of all willing, is for each particular will a consuming fire; in order to be able to live within it, the human must die unto all particularity, which is why the attempt to step out of this center into the periphery is almost necessary in order to seek there some calm for his selfhood. (VII, 381/47-8)

The freedom of the human person is, effectively, a freedom to give up the particularity of the self and become a submissive organ of the whole – or to try to actualize the independence of the self, to fall from the centre, and to be consumed in the process. Either way, the house always wins.

What does this mean for the human person? At first sight, the *Freedom Essay* indeed bestows great value on personhood. 'Only in personhood is there life', Schelling writes, not in reason alone. (VII, 413/75) God should be conceived as a person, too. All that happens, happens by virtue of God's personhood and in order to perfectly realize God's personhood. (VII, 396/59;403–4/65–6) Yet this positive appreciation of personhood seems hard to square with Schelling's corporatism. Is the person an organ (instrument) or an end in itself?

It is difficult to derive from the *Freedom Essay* alone how Schelling evaluates human personhood and individuality. By taking recourse to some related works can we better understand the role of personhood in Schelling's

thought of this period.[24] Christian Danz has argued that the understanding of personhood in the *Freedom Essay* is largely continuous with Schelling's understanding of individuality in works associated with his philosophy of identity. In Danz's interpretation of these earlier works, the individual serves as a particular embodiment or image of the Absolute, and in this sense constitutes a unique 'individual totality'.[25] Individuality is, ontologically speaking, not mere nothingness. The condition, however, is that the individual does not exist *for itself*, but acts exclusively as an embodiment of the universal will. 'The human being is representation of the Absolute', Danz writes, 'and thus image of the absolute identity, by virtue of the fact that his particularity is not something for itself, but is basis or foundation of the universal'.[26] On the one hand, this implies that each person has their own individual role or identity in the larger order. Schelling does not propose a sweeping homogenization of the diversity of individuals into a mass of identical automata. On the other hand, we see here the functionalist understanding of personhood that is implicit in the *Freedom Essay*. The person must each in their own way serve the whole, and thereby become the local embodiment of the universal will – or as the *Freedom Essay* puts it, act as its organ.

The fact that personhood, for Schelling, does not constitute an end in itself, but serves to actualize something higher, something *impersonal,* is made explicit in the *Stuttgart Lectures*. Here, Schelling makes a distinction between the human *spirit* and the *soul.* The human spirit is 'what is actually personal in the human' (VII, 466); it represents the egoic consciousness and will. Because the personal spirit is still characterized by self-will and therefore susceptible to evil, it does not represent the highest in the human being: 'thus the human spirit should, in turn, be a relative non-being in relation to something higher'. (VII, 467) This is to be found in the soul. The soul transcends the realm of the individual and personal. The personal spirit must, therefore, give way to the impersonal soul. 'The soul is what is actually divine in the human, hence the *impersonal,* the actual being, *to which the personal should be subjugated* as relative non-being.' (VII, 468, emphasis altered) In art and science, but also in morality and love, the personal indi-

24 See also Christian Danz, 'Subjekt – Individuum – Persönlichkeit. Zur werkgeschichtlichen Entwicklung von Schellings Verständnis der Person zwischen 1800 und 1810', *Schellings Freiheitsschrift – Methode, System, Kritik*, eds. Thomas Buchheim, Thomas Frisch & Nora C. Wachsmann, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021; Michelle Kosch, 'Schelling's Moral Psychology in the Freiheitsschrift and Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen', *Schellings Freiheitsschrift – Methode, System, Kritik*, eds. Thomas Buchheim, Thomas Frisch, & Nora C. Wachsmann, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021.

25 Danz, 'Subjekt – Individuum – Persönlichkeit', 164.

26 Danz, 'Subjekt – Individuum – Persönlichkeit', 167.

vidual is effaced and only the impersonal soul acts. 'Allow the soul in you to act […] "Act in accordance with your soul" means so much as: act not as a personal being, but rather entirely impersonally; do not disturb [the soul's] influence in yourself through your personhood.' (VII, 473, cf. VII, 312) The *telos* of personal existence is hence *self-effacement*. Humans must abandon their personal selfhood and become a vessel for the impersonal soul.[27]

In the context of these other works, we see more clearly how the corporatism in the *Freedom Essay* relates to Schelling's vision of personhood. The human person is portrayed as a functioning organ of the whole. The goal is to act as a selfless instrument of God's self-disclosure in history until 'God may be all in all.' (VII, 404/66, citing 1 Corinthians 15:28) This is realized when all self-will is subdued, when all act unanimously as organs of the universal will: 'those born out of darkness into the light join themselves to the ideal principle as the limbs to its body.' (VII, 405/67) After the willing self-effacement of all human persons, there is in effect only *one* personal being left: in this all-encompassing body of God, 'the ideal principle is fully realized and now a wholly personal being'. (VII, 405/67–8)

The *Freedom Essay* presents this eschatological vision as a bond of love. The 'secret of love', Schelling writes, is 'that it links such things of which each could exist for itself yet does not, and cannot exist without the other'. (VII, 408/70) This passage is commonly taken as demonstration of Schelling's commitment to the autonomy of individuals and the world in relation to God. Love presupposes autonomy: that each member could also have decided to exist for itself. Yet seen against the background of the *Freedom Essay* as a whole, I believe we should be careful not to read too much into this statement. Not only does it assert that love requires giving up independence; as we have seen, the possibility to refuse love and to remain independent is effectively blocked as well.[28]

Michelle Kosch has rightly pointed out that the vindication of the good is not metaphysically guaranteed for each individual. Persons are individually responsible for their decision for good or for evil.[29] However, in line with Schelling's corporatism, personal self-effacement in service of the good is ultimately the only viable option. It is not just that the choice for evil is a self-defeating one, provoking a kind of cosmic autoimmune response. In a more fundamental way, even to assert oneself, to affirm one's independence

27 For a similar reading, see Birgit Sandkaulen, 'Dieser und kein anderer? Zur Individualität der Person in Schelling's "Freiheitsschrift"', *'Alle Persönlichkeit ruht auf einem dunkeln Grunde': Schellings Philosophie der Personalität*, eds. Thomas Buchheim & Friedrich Hermanni, Berlin: Akademie, 2004, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783050083735.35.

28 See also Iber, 'Prinzipien von Personalität in Schelling's "Freiheitsschrift"', 135–6.

29 Kosch, *Freedom and Reason in Kant, Schelling, and Kierkegaard*, 97.

from the universal whole, is to become immediately identified as a malignant organ. It would seem the point of freedom and personhood is only to willingly undo itself. Schelling is clear, moreover, that the goal of universal incorporation will inevitably succeed. Evil will eventually be 'cast out' like an antigen is removed from the body. (VII, 405/67)

3. Conclusion

The corporatism of the *Freedom Essay* deeply marks how Schelling conceives of the 'relative independence' of the world and human beings in relation to God. The will of the Ground is ultimately nothing but the divine Intellect in becoming. The self-will of creatures is always already organized by the universal will. Finally, the freedom of human beings is, in effect, merely the freedom to fulfil one's organic function in the whole.

The incorporation (*hineinnehmen*) of human freedom in divine life serves as Werner Marx's interpretation of the *Freedom Essay*'s conclusion. The finite freedom of human beings becomes, in his view, an 'active player in the game of the realization of divine love'.[30] Yet we see that in truth, the game is rigged. The outcome is already decided. As players, we have the freedom to make a 'wrong move', but then we lose and are out of the game – or we each time play the right move. But what kind of game would that be? Are we still to call that play? It seems rather like the play to which Schelling compares history in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). In the play that we call history, we are all 'co-composers of the whole', though we are governed by 'one Spirit, who composes in all'. (III, 602) We seem to play our role 'quite freely and as we wish', but 'if the absolute synthesis were ever fully developed, we would see that everything that in the course of history has happened through freedom, as a whole followed laws, and that all actions, although they seemed to be free, were nevertheless necessary precisely to bring about this whole'. (III, 601–2) The main element that distinguishes the *Freedom Essay* from Schelling's earlier deterministic views is that we seem to be free to step out of the play, by virtue of our capacity to defy the dictates of our role. Defiance, however, would only result in our removal from the stage.

In the *Freedom Essay,* the person appears as a liminal figure. Persons remain persons only so long as they remain undecided, suspended between good and evil, standing at the threshold of transgression or obedience. For either choice would lead to personal oblivion. To assert oneself and thus to transgress is to be consumed by fire; to submit is to be assimilated by the

30 Werner Marx, 'Die Aufgabe der Freiheitsschrift Schellings', *Schelling: Geschichte, System, Freiheit*, Freiburg/München: Alben, 1977, 143.

body of the whole. That which, for Schelling, characterizes the uniqueness of the human person – radical freedom, the capacity for good and evil – is only true so long as it remains a potential that is not actualized. In a deeply paradoxical way, to exercise one's freedom is to lose it. Yet the option to remain at this liminal point, to remain person, is not allowed. 'Man stands on the threshold […] but he cannot remain undecided.' God's progressive self-revelation requires that 'in creation nothing ambiguous remains'. (VII, 374/41; cf. VII, 404/66–67) Every person is hence forced out of this undecidedness by a temptation to evil. (VII, 374/41) In the corporatist logic of the *Freedom Essay,* personhood is radically subverted to the point where personal existence is only virtually possible, but never actually. To exercise one's freedom is to forfeit personhood. Yet to preserve it by remaining undecided is not possible, because the process of total incorporation presses onwards. To be an organ or not to be at all, that is in the final instance the choice the *Freedom Essay* leaves us.[31] ▲

31 I am grateful to Filip Rasmussen, Astrid Grelz, Clara Berg, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, Jayne Svenungsson, and Vittorio Alves for providing feedback and helpful comments on earlier drafts.

SUMMARY

This paper argues that a corporatist framework underlies Schelling's metaphysical account in the *Freedom Essay* (1809). Through an analysis of Schelling's pervasive use of bodily imagery – organs, disease, fever – I examine how this framework shapes his conception of individuality, freedom, and evil. The standard interpretation sees the *Freedom Essay* as marking Schelling's break with systematic idealism through its emphasis on contingency, worldly autonomy, and radical human freedom. Arguing against this reading, I contend that the corporatist framework points in a different direction. The world appears in Schelling's account as a corporate whole, where all individuals serve their instrumental role as organs. The paper first examines Schelling's concept of the Ground and nature, showing how what appears as contingent, blind striving is actually teleologically organized in service of a rational order. Subsequently analysing human freedom, Schelling's portrayal of evil as disease reveals how the corporatist logic eliminates the possibility of genuine autonomy from the divine order. It makes evil's actualization impossible by design and guarantees the final incorporation of all beings into a unified body. Through the guiding metaphor of the bodily organ, Schelling presents a vision of human personhood that sees its fulfilment in personal self-effacement. The paper argues that his corporatist logic brings the person into an impossible position: it must either efface itself willingly or be forcibly eliminated as a sick organ.

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 52–65
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28857

The Beginning of All Reality

Schelling on Contraction and Creation

CLARA BERG

Clara Berg is a PhD student in systematic theology at Lund University.

clara.berg@ctr.lu.se

Regardless of the wide-ranging themes of Friedrich Schelling's (1775–1854) work, a common thread runs through all his thinking: a profound longing for life, one that resists mechanistic interpretations and embraces risk, struggle, and creation. In his *Freedom Essay* (1809), Schelling declares that 'where there is no struggle, there is no life.'[1] Creation cannot unfold without tension. Light cannot exist without darkness. Only through the finite can the infinite reveal.

A key concept in Schelling's quest for life is the concept of contraction (*Contraktion*).[2] The concept has been interpreted in terms of *zimzum*, an idea rooted in Lurianic Kabbalah, grounded in the Jewish mysticism of Isaac Luria (1534–1572).[3] *Zimzum* describes a divine contraction or withdrawal preceding creation, through which the divine makes space for a world other than itself to emerge. During the 20th century, the concept became a resource for engaging with the experience of God-forsakenness, suffering, and theodicy. Thus, for example, the German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1926–2024) linked *zimzum* to *kenosis* – God's self-emptying on the cross, as depicted in the Christ hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians.

1 F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love & Johannes Schmidt, New York: State University of New York Press, 2006, 63. Hereafter cited as *Freedom Essay.*

2 In Thomas Pfau's English translation of the *Stuttgart Seminars*, which I cite below, the term '*Contraktion*' is rendered as 'concentration.' I use 'contraction' to align with the terminology more commonly employed in the secondary literature on Schelling's philosophy.

3 Christoph Schulte, *Zimzum: God and the Origin of the World*, trans. Corey Twitchell, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023, 226.

Hence, he linked the act of creation to God's self-giving love rather than to divine power.[4] Similarly, the Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas (1903–1993) turned to *zimzum* in his reflections on the crisis of divine omnipotence, further underlining the divine self-divestment and renunciation of power before creation.[5]

While both Moltmann and Jonas invoked *zimzum* to illustrate a divine restriction of power (although Jonas did so in a more radical way than Moltmann), Schelling, in contrast, sustains divine power through it. Thereby, he shows affinities with a Lutheran understanding of *theologia crucis*, where God reveals his power through opposites – in humiliation and weakness – underlining the experiential rather than the logical dimension of divine revelation. While the theological roots in the Lutheran theology of the cross are evident, Schelling still challenges the traditional conception of God by emphasizing God as life in constant becoming.[6] God is the life that evolves in nature and human freedom – appearing in the tension between the ground of existence and existence itself, between contraction and expansion.[7] By understanding God's becoming as a process within creation, a sharp distinction between ontology and self-revelation is no longer maintained. For Schelling, both being and revelation depend on the dynamic of opposition and struggle. Without opposition, neither God's existence nor his revelation in creation would be possible.[8]

---

4 Moltmann states: 'there was already a cross in the heart of God before the world was created and before Christ was crucified on Golgotha.' Jürgen Moltmann, 'God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World', *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis, Grand Rapids*, ed. John Polkinghorne, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2001, 137–151, esp. 147.

5 Ian Alexander Moore interprets Jonas' understanding of *zimzum* in kenotic terms, arguing that: 'unlike in the Kabbalah, Jonas adds that God's divestment of self (which sounds more like Christian *kenōsis* or self-emptying) must be total.' Ian Alexander Moore, 'The Divine Stakes of Human Freedom: Jonas in Dialogue with Schelling', *Kabiri* 4 (2024), 113–129, 121.

6 Christoph Schulte writes: 'Both Oetinger and Schelling, who knew that the assumption of a self-movement of God in zimzum, like any assumption of a change of God, represented a break with the Aristotelian conception of God as an eternal, unchanging, and absolute unmoved mover.' Schulte, *Zimzum*, 114.

7 Schelling writes 'Either we conceive of the primordial Being as something complete and immutably present, which is the ordinary concept of God [maintained] by the so-called rational religion and by abstract systems, generally speaking. The more we elaborate this concept of God, however, the less life God appears to have for us, and the less it is possible to conceive of Him as an actual, personal, and properly living being, in the sense in which we consider ourselves living beings.' F. W. J. Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars (1810)', *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, ed. Thomas Pfau, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994, 195–243, esp. 206.

8 It is crucial to remember that Schelling is doing philosophy and not Christian theology. However, this does not mean that his thought is devoid of theological influences or lacks relevance for theology. On the contrary, Schelling's thinking is deeply shaped by the biblical tradition. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, his philosophy has had a significant

In this article, I explore Schelling's understanding of divine contraction, or zimzum, in relation to the idea of life as struggle. I begin by introducing the notion of life as struggle in Schelling's thinking, situating it within his engagement with speculative pietism influenced by Kabbalah. I then turn to the relation between zimzum and reality, highlighting how zimzum can be seen as a movement either toward or away from a point. Building on this, I conclude by reflecting on the connection between zimzum and kenosis, suggesting that they should be understood as part of the same movement in Schelling's thinking, through his understanding of life as struggle.

Life as Struggle

Schelling's *Freedom Essay* is often considered the starting point for Schelling's turn toward existence – beginning in the experience of human freedom, understood in terms of standing at the threshold of conflicting forces.[9] The work can be viewed either as a break or a turning point within Schelling's philosophical trajectory. Regardless of the perspective, it undoubtedly marks a pivotal moment in his thought, laying the foundation for his later thinking where he seeks reality beyond or prior to the conceptual – both as a critique against the idealism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), and the immanentism of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677).

The question that occupies Schelling in his late thinking is one that has been posed many times before, most famously by Leibniz: 'Why is there anything at all? Why is there not nothing?'[10] The question is explicitly formulated in Schelling's *Berlin Lectures* (1842). However, the question is deeply intertwined with the shift in Schelling's thinking around 1809, which is grounded in his recognition that idealist philosophy cannot provide a logical answer to the ultimate why-question. The beginning of existence is not a rational move, as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) would claim; Rather, it 'is an act of will that prefers the unknown and unknowable over the merely conceptual'.[11]

Schelling's critique of the mechanistic or merely conceptual understanding of life and nature is rooted in several intellectual influences of his time.

---

impact on a wide range of theologians, from Sergei Bulgakov and Johann Sebastian Drey to Paul Tillich and Walter Kasper.

9 Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 41. The relation between the personalization of the divine and human freedom is central to the understanding of the risk taken in creation. God can not reveal in something that is not like him in terms of freedom – hence his revelation, as well as his self-realization is dependent on human freedom.

10 F. W. J. Schelling, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007, 94.

11 Sean McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, 142.

However, I will focus on speculative pietism, especially the thinking of the Christian kabbalist Friedrich Cristoph Oetinger (1702–1782), which played a significant role during Schelling's formative years.

During the period in which Schelling wrote the *Freedom Essay*, his thought increasingly incorporated esotericism and mysticism, influenced by thinkers such as Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) and Jacob Boehme (1575–1624). This led to a rich synthesis of idealistic thinking, esotericism, Jewish mysticism and Christian metaphysics. However, already as a young boy, Schelling had been exposed to the works of Oetinger, who was a central figure of Württemberg Pietism, the religious milieu in which Schelling's father served as a pastor.[12] This early exposure seems to have made a lasting impression on Schelling, which can be seen in his understanding of life and creation, which mirrors Oetinger's emphasis on life as a dynamic, evolving force rather than a static, mechanistic one.[13] The Schelling-scholar Sean McGrath describes Oetinger's concept of life:

> Oetinger's speculative pietism is a peculiar blend of modern philosophy, Kabbalah, alchemy, and Christian theology. The eclectic blend of sources is held together by Oetinger's one great thought, the notion of *life*. In Oetinger's view, life is the essence of the Biblical Revelation. The common enemy of theology and philosophy is mechanism, which elevates the lifeless causal interaction of discrete particles – ostensibly a useful if not necessary abstraction for modern physics – into a universal ontological paradigm. Modern natural scientific discoveries, Oetinger argues, need to be interpreted in a bio-theological context that understands the divine, not as a first cause or highest being, but as a self-developing life. […] Life is struggle, a dialectic of conflict and resolution, and only possible through the antagonism and resolution of polarities.[14]

12 Sean McGrath, 'Retrieving the Schellingian Tradition: Friedrich Christoph Oetinger's Speculative Pietism', *Kabiri* 1 (2018), 175–192, esp. 175–176.

13 The connection between Schelling and kabbalah was first mentioned by Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929) in a letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg (1884–1969) in 1917 and further highlighted by Ernst Benz (1907–1978) amongst others. However, it is important to remember that Schelling never read Jewish Kabbalistic texts himself; he only encountered their influence through Christian thinkers influenced by Kabbalah. Hence, when Schelling encountered Kabalistic teachings, they had already been mixed with Christian thought. All he knew about Kabbalah was second-hand, through Christian thinkers, most notably Oetinger, whose philosophy blended influences from alchemy, Christian theology, modern philosophy, and Kabbalah. Schulte, *Zimzum*, 223–224.

14 McGrath, 'Retrieving the Schellingian Tradition', 177.

In this description, God is understood as life rather than as an unchanging, unmoved mover. Oetinger's critique of mechanistic science follows from this view and reinforces the idea of life as struggle. This idea is at the core of Schelling's conception both of life and (perhaps even more striking) of the divine.

The idea of struggle as a presupposition for life leads Schelling in a direction where he introduces an idea of a non-divine aspect of the divine. Without a ground for its existence, neither God nor the world could appear. Since nothing can exist outside of God, the ground for God's existence must lie within God. However, this ground is not God himself – it is 'the yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself.'[15] This yearning is will, though not a 'conscious but a divining will [*ahnender Wille*].'[16] The 'divining will' is to be understood as an intuitive, pre-conscious will that anticipates understanding.[17] Schelling argues for the necessity of the dark principle, or the ground in God, in terms of opposition. For something to become manifest, it must have an opposite. Schelling writes: '[e]verything, if it is to become manifest, requires something that *it itself* is not *sensu stricto*'.[18] What distinguishes creation, and more specifically what distinguishes human beings from God, is dependency. For God, the ground of his existence – that which is not God – is found within God, because God is an actual Being: 'free of anything before or outside itself'.[19] However, for God to become manifest, God is dependent on this ground through which God can become. Thus, 'alongside the eternal Being there prevails in him an eternal becoming'.[20] The becoming of God in that which is not God connects the concept of self-revelation to God's very ontology. Self-revelation, or manifestation, is central to God's existence; without revelation, God would lack both life and existence. This understanding is rooted in the experience of life as struggle.

In the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling describes the ultimate origin as non-ground or *Ungrund* – a being that existed 'before the ground and before that which exists (as separate) but not yet as *love*'.[21] The *Ungrund* should not be confused with Absolute identity but understood in terms of indifference. Schelling argues that a separation occurs, through which the individuated can emerge. He contends that the emergence of consciousness

15 Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 28.
16 Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 29.
17 Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 29.
18 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 208.
19 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 206.
20 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 206.
21 Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 68.

from the indifference of the Absolute arises from an original separation in being. Through this separation, the Absolute differentiates itself from that which it is not itself, thereby creating the ground for existence. In his later philosophy, Schelling describes this as a tear in being – existence rests on a pre-conscious decision: a decision (Entscheidung) leading to a separation (Scheidung) that makes existence possible. Thus, existence always carries a dimension of separation or differentiation. The original movement or separation is developed in Schelling's *Stuttgart Seminars*, written the year after the publication of the *Freedom Essay*, where it is related to the primordial force of contraction.[22]

Contraction Away from or to the Point

In the Swabian theological landscape, the concept of contraction, or *zimzum*, became central through the works of Oetinger, who writes: 'Neither a manifestation nor a creation can take place without attraction, what the Hebrews call *zimzum*.'[23] For life to emerge, a space must exist where the spontaneous and unforeseen can happen, a space where God can reveal Himself. The idea formulated by Oetinger is echoed in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, where Schelling asserts that: 'Concentration [*Contraktion*] […] marks the beginning of all reality'.[24] Schelling argues that the beginning of creation is God's descent or lowering. However, the contraction is a manifestation of divine strength, not weakness. Quoting Goethe, Schelling proclaims that: 'Whoever will greatness must concentrate himself; Only in self-restriction is the artist revealed.'[25] Before the differentiation, or self-restriction of God, nothing can exist – not even God himself. Without contraction, God can not reveal as the Lord of Being.

Agata Bielek-Robson highlights two distinct interpretations of the Lurianic *zimzum*: either it can be understood as 'God's withdrawal "away

22 The *Stuttgart Seminars* were held the year after the publication of the *Freedom Essay.* The lectures have been described as the link between the *Freedom Essay* and *The Ages of the World,* and introduce Schelling's work to a 'largely nonexpert, though well-educated audience'. (Thomas Pfau, 'A Note on the Text', *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling*, ed. Thomas Pfau, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994, 195–196, here 196.) In the lectures Schelling describes the transition from essence to existence in relation to the notion of opposite: 'However, everything can become manifest only through its opposite, i.e., identity through nonidentity, difference, and distinguishable principles. *How* this might apply to God we shall leave open for the time being, and we merely wish to point out *that* a separation, a difference must be posited if we ever wish to make the transition from essence to existence.' Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 200.

23 Christoph Oetinger, *Theologia ex Idea Vitae Deducta*, 1765, cited in Schulte, *Zimzum*, 140.

24 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 203.

25 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 203.

from the point"', as we see in the interpretation of Gershom Scholem, or as 'God's *contraction-in-anger* and "to the point"', which especially is found in Christian Kabbalah, influenced by the thought of Boehme.[26]

Bielek-Robson contends that the understanding of withdrawal from a point can be framed in terms of divine *kenosis*.[27] She argues that this interpretation contrasts Schelling's concept of contraction, as it rather enhances the moment when the divine contracts into ground. In contrast to the kenotic interpretation of *zimzum* as withdrawal, Bielek-Robson highlights a problematic risk of dualism in Schelling's thinking.[28] While Hegel follows Scholem in portraying God's withdrawal – in a way closely related to the notion of *kenosis* – Schelling understands the initial contraction as a movement toward the ground of being. Bielek-Robson reads Schelling's view as leaning toward a Marcionite understanding of the divine, creating a dichotomy between a wrathful creator God and a loving, salvific God revealed in Christ, drawing primarily on the theogony of Schelling's *The Ages of the World*. In this context, the contraction, associated with the creator God, stands in contrast to the expansive, loving nature of the God revealed in Christ. Bielek-Robson writes:

> In the end, therefore, *tsimtsum* as 'compression' lends itself to two very different imaginary understandings: either hardening or diminution. Putting all kabbalistic technicalities aside, and their often contradictory interplay between concentration and retreat, what really matters is the ultimate *meaning* of this gesture: either 'kenotic love' or 'wrathful jealousy', which may also be regarded as the most fundamental difference between Hegel and Schelling.[29]

Bielek-Robson highlights the potential risks inherent in Schelling's conception of darkness and chaos in relation to creation, as well as the potential danger of a Marcionite motif within Schelling's philosophy, especially related to the similarities between Schelling's philosophy and the Lutheran

---

26 Agata Bielek-Robson & Daniel H. Weiss, 'Preface', *Tsimtsum and Modernity: Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, eds. Agata Bielek-Robson & Daniel H. Weiss, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021, VII–XXIII, esp. XIII.

27 Agata Bielek-Robson, 'The God of Luria, Hegel and Schelling: The Divine Contraction and the Modern Metaphysics of Finitude', *Mystical Theology and Continental Philosophy: Interchange in the Wake of God*, eds. David Lewin, Simon D. Podmore, & Duane Williams, New York: Routledge, 2017, 32–50, esp. 46.

28 Bielik-Robson's analysis draws primarily on *The Ages of the World*. Focusing on the *Freedom Essay* and the *Stuttgart Seminars* may contribute to a difference in emphasis, not least with regard to trinitarian aspects.

29 Bielek-Robson, 'The God of Luria, Hegel and Schelling', 41.

idea of *Deus Absconditus*. By drawing attention to the dividing of God into one wrathful (contracting) aspect and another, loving (expanding) one, she points out a significant risk in Schelling's thinking. The risk arises when the contracting movement in God is associated with the God we encounter in the Old Testament, while the expanding movement is linked to the God revealed in Christ. Nonetheless, I suggest that Schelling's conception of the dark ground – and even the madness of God in creation – fundamentally differs from a Marcionite understanding of the divine, particularly due to its emphasis on life as struggle and dynamic unfolding.

Schelling seeks to avoid both a gnostic view that associate's nature with evil, and an interpretation of creation as merely an emanation of the divine. For him, the created world is neither evil nor accidental, but rather a manifestation of life enfolding. Bielek-Robson argues that Schelling overlooks the distinction between 'God vomiting himself into nature', and 'God releasing nature [from himself]'.[30] However, as I argue, for Schelling, this is not merely a technicality but a fundamental aspect of his ontology. His understanding of contraction and expansion, as outlined in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, does not simply reflect a failure to recognize this distinction, but rather encapsulates the core of his understanding of the relationship between duality and unity – particularly in relation to his view of the dynamic struggle of life. There is a tragic dimension to all life that is central to Schelling's thought. However, this does not imply that creation is inherently bad or evil. Schelling sees the tragic dimension of creation as an essential component of the life unfolding – through which joy, beauty, and love can reveal.

The Primacy of Being over Thinking

Both the understanding of opposites as unified in *one act* and the tragic condition of existence are deeply intertwined with Schelling's philosophical view of the primacy of being over thinking. Schelling argues that existence precedes reason. This primacy serves as the necessary presupposition for reason to emerge. The longing that leads Schelling to the un-prethinkable ground of being is formulated as a critique against modern philosophy. In the introduction to the novel *Clara: Or on Nature's Connection to the Spirit World* (1810),[31] Schelling states: 'Ever since the peaceful harmony broke up

30 Bielek-Robson, 'The God of Luria, Hegel and Schelling', 41.

31 The novel is an unfinished fragment, never published during Schelling's lifetime, and its origin remains unclear. The introduction cited is likewise a posthumous addition. There are several reasons to believe that the novel was written around 1810, mainly based on similarities in the phrasing of letters and lectures from this period. A nuanced view is offered by Fiona Steinkamp, who sees the 1810 date as a compromise. She proposes that Schelling likely revisited the manuscript throughout his life, leading to a text that reflects different stages of his thinking. See further Fiona Steinkamp, 'General Introduction', pp. vii–xl in F. W. J.

in which the sciences lived not so long ago, philosophy can be characterized as an intense striving toward the spiritual that decidedly lacks a corresponding capacity to rise to it.'[32] Without a ground in a reality prior to reason, reason gets stuck in the conceptual.[33] The spiritual without the corporeal, or the ideal without the real does not 'satisfy our hearts';[34] it does not speak to our 'ardent [heiße]longing'.[35]

In *On the History of Modern Philosophy* (1833–1834), Schelling writes: 'becoming cannot be there before something becomes, existence not before something exists'.[36] God desires to be, not an indifferent, static being, but a living, existing one. God (not yet as God) longs for the finite, through which he can come to know himself. Thus, the contraction serves only as the ground for life's expansion, Schelling writes:

> God posits himself (in part) as the first power, *as* something unconscious; however, He cannot concentrate His self into the Real without expanding as the Ideal, that is, [He] cannot posit Himself as the Real, as an *object*, without positing Himself *simultaneously* as a *subject* (that is, without freeing the Ideal); and both of these [moments] constitute *one Act* of Absolute simultaneity; with His actual concentration into the Real, God also posits His expansion as the Ideal.[37]

God exists as a living God only in the tension between God as existence, and God as existing: 'For the Real in God is *Being* or existence, whereas the Ideal [in God] is the *existing*, that wherein the Real and Ideal are one, that is, the actually existing, living God.'[38] Only in the transition through the finite can the infinite reveal – not as a thing, but through something. While the notion of contraction highlights a tragic dimension of all life – its narrow-

Schelling, *Clara: Or on Nature's Connection to the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp, New York: State University of New York Press, 2002.

32 Schelling, *Clara*, 3.

33 In *Clara*, Schelling writes: 'Corporeality is not imperfection, but when the body is suffused by the soul, then it is perfection in its plenitude. The merely spiritual life doesn't satisfy our heart. There is something in us that desires a more essential reality; our thoughts come to rest only at the final unity; united life must follow separated life; [Only] in perfected externality does the soul find its final peace. And as the artist does not find peace in thinking about his work, but only when he has represented it physically, and as anyone fired by an ideal wants to find or reveal it in a physical-visible form, the goal of all longing is likewise the very perfection of corporeality as a reflection and mirror of perfect spirituality.' Schelling, *Clara*, 80.

34 Schelling, *Clara*, 80.

35 Schelling, *Clara*, 13.

36 F. W. J. Schelling, 'Munich Lectures (ca 1833–1834)', *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 145.

37 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 207.

38 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 204.

ness and anguish – it should not be reduced to a moment of evil. Instead, it should be understood as a foundation for all existence – its eternal beginning.[39] Darkness will not disappear but will always remain a potential in the ground of all life. Yet in God, this darkness – like the sadness within Him – 'serves only the eternal joy of overcoming'[40] – thus manifesting divine power. The initial separation in being is not an eternal exclusion; rather, it marks the beginning of creation, through which that which is in darkness is raised into actuality and light. Schelling writes: 'Yet in seeking to exclude it from Himself, on the one hand, He also strives to integrate it with Himself, on the other hand; He seeks to raise it to form, to transfigure it – although subordinate – into His superior essence and to evoke consciousness *from* this unconscious matter.'[41]

God separates that which is not Himself from Himself, not to erase it, but so that the non-being of being may be transformed. In this transformation, human freedom plays a pivotal role. Human freedom is the vehicle for divine revelation, through which the unfolding of divine life is made manifest. What drives the movement toward separation is not the expulsion of non-being, but the longing for reality – a desire rooted in love not yet realized as love. This love, which underpins both contraction and expansion, prevents the resistance of letting go of that which is hidden or sealed in the dark ground of the eternal beginning.[42]

---

39 This is described by McGrath, who writes: 'The dark ground of spirit, that in God which is not God, is let loose and something comes into being, which in a strict sense ought not to be (something that is logically unnecessary): a being outside of God. This renders nature formally equivalent to evil, but formal equivalence is not sameness. It is by its fruit that the moral significance of a contingent being is known: the ground is let loose by God, not in order to produce evil, but for the sake of love. Nature is intended by God to become a free partner to God, another to God, which can be united with God in love, that is, which can be contingently, freely and knowingly united with its divine origin. This union of love, in which God becomes known, can only occur if God runs the risk of evil.' McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the late Schelling*, 205.

40 Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, 62.

41 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 208.

42 In his later lectures on revelation, Schelling describes this through the metaphor of art: 'The mystery of true art is to be *simultaneously* mad and level-headed [*wahnsinnig und besonnen*], not in distinctive moments, but rather *uno eodemque actu* [altogether in a single act.] This is what distinguishes the Apollonian inspiration from the Dionysian. The highest task of art, which gleams before us like a miracle, is to present in the most conditioned and finite form an infinite content, which, so to speak, contests all form. God is in no way the mere antithesis of finitude; God is in no way that which can only be pleased in the infinite, but rather God appears precisely as the most artificial of beings [*Wesen*], seeking finitude and not resting until He has brought everything into the most finite form.' F. W. J. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992, 422. Translation retreived from Jason M. Wirth, 'Schelling and Luther', *Theological Research. A Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2017), 93–105, esp. 96.

Schelling's understanding of the primacy of being over thinking is fundamental to his dynamic ontology, where the relation between contraction and expansion cannot be captured in traditional terms of dialectics. The relation between contraction and expansion emerges throughout Schelling's work in several images – for instance, in terms of gravity and light, rhythm and melody. In *Clara*, the pulsating life is illustrated through the image of the river.

Creation and Incarnation

Clara is written as a dialogue between Clara, a doctor and a priest. At the beginning of the novel, we follow the priest and the doctor to a cloister, where they meet a 'young, well-educated clergyman',[43] a character inspired by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who shows them the library and the rarities of his care. However, the doctor says:

> … we were more drawn to the magnificent view from the windows, which looked out onto the distant plain and up to the hill where we had been earlier, than to these dead treasures. The plain was covered with towns and villages and the powerful river wound through it, becoming visible in places as if it were only a thin, silver ribbon [*Band*].[44]

The longing for life, stands in contrast to concepts without reality, depicted as dead treasures. Central in the landscape is the river. The image of the river reappears in *Clara*, as a picture of real life. At the end of the novel, at the beginning of spring Clara and her friends are in the chapel at the top of a hill. Here, the doctor says: 'The river is more a picture of real life [*des wirklichen Lebens*]: it draws our imagination along with it into unrestricted bounds, as into a distant future.'[45]

The river is described as a ribbon, or as a tie [*Band*]. This is not purely figurative. The tie relates to Schelling's ontology and his understanding of duality. The notion of the tie is central to Schelling's philosophy and relates to his understanding of the copula – which in German is translated to *Band*, a key concept in his *Freedom Essay*, as well as in *The Ages of the World*. The copula is that which binds together through separation – it is the living principle between opposites, or as depicted in *Clara* it is the 'living word' of all things.[46] In understanding the relationship between the infinite and finite, one could say, from Schelling's perspective, that the infinite is the

43 Schelling, *Clara*, 10.
44 Schelling, *Clara*, 10.
45 Schelling, *Clara*, 67.
46 Schelling, *Clara*, 73.

finite – in parallel to Schelling's understanding that freedom is necessity. However, this should not be understood through logical dialectic, nor as an immanent pantheism, but through the understanding of becoming. This relates to the copula – the linking, operating, and ordering verb 'is' in the phrase: the infinite is the finite. The infinite, the essence of life, exists only in its opposite, through which it searches the ultimate form. The understanding of the river as a ribbon is a picture not only of life unfolding but of creation itself. The river winds through the landscape, embodying the act of creation – a movement never complete. It connects everything with a power that both binds and liberates.

I began this article by highlighting the relation between *zimzum* and *kenosis*, tracing a shift from an understanding of *kenosis* as solely connected to the incarnation in Christ to one related to the act of creation. As shown, Schelling's contraction can be read in contrast to a kenotic understanding. When, however, the relation between contraction and expansion is understood as the pulsating life of existence, a different interpretive possibility comes into view. The contraction should not be understood as creation itself, but rather as a prerequisite for creation, which emerges through the simultaneous expansion of the intellect or Logos.

Quoting Hartmut Rosenau, Sean Mcgrath underscores that, in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling's question is no longer 'How do we raise the finite to the infinite?' but rather 'How does the infinite become finite?'[47] The answer to this question is located in the concept of contraction, or *Entäusserung*, which is the German term for *kenosis*. In one version of the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling makes a correction that emphasizes the relation between the descent of God and the notion of self-emptying (*Entäusserung*).[48] The 'beginning of creation' he argues, 'is an effect of the divine self-emptying [*eine Wirkung der göttlichen Entäusserung*], the becoming man [*Menschwerdung*], the first incarnation of God'.[49] McGrath observes that: 'The end result of this incarnation could not simply be a return to the eternal: what begins as unconscious ends as conscious; what begins as impersonal (the absolute) ends as personal (the Christ)'.[50]

---

47 Sean McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious*, Hove: Routledge, 2012, 158.

48 It should be noted that although Schelling explicitly employs the concept of *Entäusserung* in the *Stuttgart Seminars* to describe the divine contraction as a form of self-emptying, the kenotic motif is not yet systematically developed at this stage. Rather, it functions as a seed of the kenotic motif, which will later be deepened and conceptually elaborated in Schelling's late philosophy of revelation.

49 Schelling cited in McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit*, 158. See also F. W. J. Schelling, *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2016, 84.

50 McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit*, 158.

From a theological perspective, Schelling can be read as standing within a tradition in which creation and incarnation are intertwined. Schelling writes:

> Concentration, then, marks the beginning of all reality. For this reason, it is the concentrating rather than the expanding nature that possesses a primordial and grounding force. Thus the beginning of creation amounts indeed to a *descent* [*Herablassung*] of God; He properly descends into the Real, contracts Himself entirely into the Real. Yet such an act does not imply anything unworthy of God but, in fact, it is this descent that marks the greatest act for God and, indeed, for Christianity as well. By contrast, a metaphorically elevated [*hinaufgeschraubter*] God will benefit neither our minds nor our hearts.[51]

The descent does not mark a shift from absolute power to lesser power; rather, it unfolds in the opposite direction – only through descent can the fully divine power manifest.

Creation is an incarnation – without finitude, the infinite cannot exist as infinite. While there is a distinction between the divine presence in nature and the revelation of the Logos in Christ, Schelling argues that the Son is the essence of nature – hidden in creation, revealed in Christ.[52] Revelation is not finished but takes place as a divine *kenosis* in nature and history – as the living bond that flows through everything, not staying in anything. Both creation and incarnation emerge from the movement between contraction and expansion, the life of the in-between. The divine is 'slumbering' in creation, divining and shaping it, yet becoming through it, manifesting divine sovereignty through the emergence of transformative pulsating life. Like a river, it draws creation toward a future unknown. ▲

51 Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 203–204.

52 'However, if we look at the bond between the two, this [bond] is not merely divine but it is God Himself; yet it is not God in an unconditional sense but rather the God who has been created in nonbeing and whose creator we find precisely in the unconditional or being God. The bond that inheres in A = B (if we take it for nature in its entirety) is thus indeed God, yet it is God as a product of Himself or God as the Son, of whom, because He is the essence of nature, the Scripture rightly claims that everything is made through Him and nothing without Him.' Schelling, 'Stuttgart Seminars', 213.

SUMMARY

This article examines Friedrich Schelling's understanding of the beginning of reality through the concept of contraction and its relation to his view of life as struggle. Drawing on his rejection of mechanistic accounts of life, the article shows how Schelling envisions all life – divine as well as finite – as arising through tension, polarity, and dynamic becoming. God is not a static principle but life unfolding, shaped by the interplay between darkness and light, ground and existence. The analysis highlights Schelling's indebtedness to speculative pietism, particularly Oetinger's understanding of life as structured through opposing forces. Within this theological-philosophical context, contraction appears as the primordial movement that grounds the possibility of both creation and revelation; without it, neither God nor the world could manifest. Contraction and expansion emerge as inseparable aspects of a single living rhythm that underlies all being. Building on this, the article argues that Schelling's account of the beginning already carries an incarnational structure.Creation becomes the condition for divine self-revelation, since the infinite becomes actual only through the finite. In this way, the article shows how Schelling's conception of creation and incarnation belong to the same movement through which divine life becomes manifest in the finite.

Jean-Luc Marion. *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere: A Contribution to a Critical History and a Phenomenal Concept of Revelation*. Trans. Stephen E. Lewis & Stephanie Rumpza. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024. 494 s.

Jean-Luc Marions *Revelation Comes from Elsewhere* (*D'ailleurs, la révélation*, 2020) är resultatet av mer än fyrtio års arbete och kan läsas som en syntes av hans samlade projekt. Här riktas uppmärksamheten mot uppenbarelsebegreppet och dess historiska, fenomenologiska och teologiska dimensioner. Med utgångspunkt i tesen som utvecklas redan i *God Without Being* (1982) – att fenomenologin bör ersätta metafysiken som första filosofi – tillämpar Marion nu sitt samlade program på den teologiska traditionen. Uppenbarelse förstås som ett fenomen som visar sig från ett radikalt ”annanstans”. Eftersom detta annanstans undandrar sig begreppsliggörande bör vi sluta försöka fixera det och i stället rikta oss mot det oåterkalleliga mötet med det. Till skillnad från de tidigare verken, där frågan främst gällde huruvida uppenbarelse överhuvudtaget är möjlig, erbjuder Marion en omfattande läsning av den bibliska traditionen och utvecklar en samlad vision av dess relation till människans existens. För den som arbetar i skärningspunkten mellan fenomenologi och teologi finns således mycket näring att hämta här.

Efter en substantiell inledning är boken uppdelad i fem större delar. Den första analyserar och dekonstruerar uppenbarelsebegreppets historiska utveckling. Marion visar hur termen uppenbarelse saknas i patristisk teologi men plötsligt uppträder i skolastiken. Med Thomas av Aquino etableras ett epistemologiskt paradigm där uppenbarelse definieras som förmedling av otillgänglig kunskap. Hos Francisco Suárez fulländas detta paradigm till en perfekt teologisk vetenskap. Men när uppenbarelsen reduceras till epistemologi förloras, enligt Marion, dess existentiella radikalitet: den bestäms på och får sin grund i mänskliga villkor i stället för genom Guds radikala annorlundaskap.

Bokens andra del är konstruktiv och utvecklar ett alternativt, fenomenologiskt uppenbarelsegrepp. Här introducerar Marion en fenomenologisk teo-logi som vänder på den senmedeltida relationen mellan filosofi och teologi. Istället för att låta uppenbarelsen bedömas av ett oberoende filosofiskt förnuft så måste filosofin, enligt Marion, bedömas utifrån hur väl den tillåter oss att tematisera uppenbarelse. I denna dynamik är det avgörande att givaren av uppenbarelse förblir ogripbar och osynlig. Desto mer osynlighet hos givaren, desto mer blir själva givenheten hos ett fenomen synlig. En verklig uppenbarelse måste med andra ord manifesteras från ett helt osynligt och ogripbart annanstans.

Den tredje delen förankrar denna vision i Bibeln. Genom att dra en linje från den hebreiska bibeln till Paulus, de synoptiska evangelierna och Johannesevangeliet argumenterar Marion för att Kristus är Uppenbarelsens fenomen *par excellence* – ”the phenomenon of all phenomena” (s. 206). Paradoxalt nog blir Kristus, ju mer han manifesterar sig, desto mindre begriplig för världen. Hans närvaro är okontrollerbar och kan endast förstås ”in the elsewhere of the Father” (s. 232). En följd härav är att Kristus inte kan fångas fenomenologiskt i världsliga kategorier; för att uppnå detta krävs en hermeneutik lika ogripbar som den gudomliga verklighet som uppenbaras.

I den fjärde delen vidgas perspektivet till en trinitarisk dimension. Marion avvisar både de ontiska metafysiska modeller som präglar de klassiska trosbekännelserna och de spekulativa historiska modellerna hos Hegel och Schelling. I stället utvecklar han en fenomenal modell. Inspirerad av de kappadokiska fäderna, Augustinus och Hans Urs von Balthasars tankar om en trinitarisk inversion, betonar han Andens osynliga förmedling av kärlek som central för Uppenbarelsen. Uppenbarelsen förstås så som en dynamik riktad mot ett ogripbart annanstans, snarare än en statisk substans som förmedlar kunskap. Inom ramen för en djuplodande trinitarisk hermeneutik kan Kristus, enligt Marion,

uttolkas som fenomenaliteten hos alla fenomen.

Den femte delen knyter samman helheten genom en omtolkning av de heideggerianska begreppen vara och tid. I ljuset av Marions Uppenbarelsebegrepp omtolkas varat som en gåva som speglas i Kristi kenotiska självutgivelse: Endast genom att erkänna att ett annanstans bortom varat träder in i världen kan varat själv tas emot som gåva. Tiden, i sin tur, förstås som något som måste vara ständigt öppet för ett beslut. Som Marion hävdar så måste vi välja mellan teleologi och eskatologi. Inför Guds annanstans ställs människan inför ett avgörande i nuet: att antingen inkludera det absoluta i historien eller historien i det absoluta.

Marions framställning är originell och imponerande i sin omfattning. Ändå väcks frågor kring hans val av motståndare. Kritiken av skolastisk metafysik är väl underbyggd, men samtida metafysiker som William Desmond, David Bentley Hart, Catherine Pickstock och John Milbank – liksom deras förgrundsgestalter, som von Balthasar, Ferdinand Ulrich och Erich Przywara – delar redan hans skepsis mot en epistemologiserad senmedeltid. Det är sant att Marions läsning av Thomas och Suárez fångar vissa drag som kommit att prägla den skolastiska traditionen. Men det finns också andra metafysiska röster idag som plockar upp samma arv och visar på mer dynamiska möjligheter.

För den som vill kritisera dagens metafysik framstår det därför som mer givande att engagera samtida röster än att fortsätta bearbeta Heideggers onto-teologiska kritik. I en sådan dialog kunde Marions fenomenologiska förståelse av Uppenbarelse vinna fler allierade än han själv räknar med, särskilt hos dem som utvecklar trinitariska ontologier präglade av relation och paradox, såsom Przywara, Milbank och Hart. Redan von Balthasar, som Marion själv ofta anför, skulle knappast acceptera en skarp uppdelning mellan en fenomenologisk och en metafysisk treenighet. Dessutom kan man fundera om inte en mer generös förståelse av teleologin och skapelsens utveckling kan förenas med den eskatologiska sprängkraft som Marion betonar.

Vad som står på spel i Marions kategoriska uppgörelse med metafysiken är i grunden frågan om hur inkluderande en teologisk vision av verkligheten kan vara. Kanske bör man i detta fall, i stället för att välja, låta skillnaderna bestå i en fruktbar spänning som kulminerar i Kristus. Liksom Kristus förenar himmel och jord, det gudomliga och det mänskliga, kan vi betona ”och” snarare än ”eller”. Oavsett detta står det klart att Revelation Comes from Elsewhere är ett betydande bidrag. För både metafysikkritiker och metafysikförsvarare erbjuder boken en viktig plattform för vidare samtal och förnyad reflektion kring uppenbarelsens teologiska betydelse.

Elias Kjörk
Doktorand i systematisk teologi
Göteborgs universitet
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28863

Anders Gerdmar, Torbjörn Aronson & Pavel Hoffma (red.). *Bibeltro. Nio teologer om bibelsyn och bibelbruk*. Uppsala: STH Academic, 2022. 379 s.

Denna bok är i huvudsak tillkommen vid det teologiska forskarseminariet på Skandinavisk teologisk högskola. Två andra författare har bjudits in, Christian Braw och Karl-Henrik Wallerstein.

Genomgående för flera av bidragen är en kritik mot det som brukar kallas historisk-kritisk metod. Exempelvis hävdas det här ibland, och då inte sällan med bravur, sådant som att historisk-kritisk metod inte primärt är historisk utan drivs av en sekulariserad världsbild. Metoden har rötterna i upplysningen och är så immanent att den lätt blir ateistisk.

Wallerstein berättar om konflikten mellan universitet och kyrkan och menar att de i stället kan och bör komplettera varandra. Universiteten kan och bör ge kunskap som stärker tron i stället för att ifrågasätta den. Det som ofta kallas historisk-kritisk metod

leder människan till två samtidiga sanningar, kyrkans och akademins. Wallerstein exemplifierar sin bibelsyn med två exempel där det inombibliska och klassiska materialet visar på andra svar än mycket av den moderna forskningen som av honom finnes svag och spekulativ. De två exemplen är dels att Mose är den huvudsaklige författaren av Moseböckerna och dels att Jesaja ligger bakom hela den bok som bär hans namn.

Ingrid Faro menar i sin artikel ”Därför tror jag på en historisk Adam och Eva”, vars titel väl beskriver innehållet, att historia och teologi i Bibeln hör ihop. Gud verkar i historien. Försöker man separera teologin från historien gör man Gud avlägsen och abstrakt, främmande från vår verklighet. I Faros mening underbyggs också Adam och Evas historicitet av de teologiska nytestamentliga hänvisningarna till dem, som Pauli om Jesus Kristus som den andre Adam.

Detta är de enda två helt exegetiska bidragen i denna bok.

Göran Lennartssons artikel går rakt in i problematiken kring den historisk-kritiska metoden, dess närhet till ateismen och den konflikt mellan tro och kyrka som detta resulterar i. Lennartsson betonar hur historisk-kritisk metod kan förneka en berättelses historicitet och se den endast som en berättelse. Alltså är annan exegetik mer historisk än den historisk-kritiska. Även annan vetenskap som språkvetenskap och arkeologi är viktig för bibelvetenskapen.

Braw skriver om hur Bibeln uppfattats och lärts ut från och med reformationen, specifikt Uppsala möte 1593, till och med *Lilla boken om kristen tro* från 1992 och *Befrielsen – Stora boken om kristen tro* från 1993. Utvecklingen från reformationen fram till några av det tidiga 1900-talets mest använda konfirmandböcker var förvisso föränderlig, menar Braw, men inte självmotsägande: Man ansåg att Bibeln, Guds ord, är klar och tillräcklig och att den helige Ande hjälper oss att förstå den. Denna föreställning motsades först i de båda böckerna tänkta att presentera kristen tro för svenskarna under tidigt 90-tal, böcker där man i stället för tro uttryckte tvivel och sökte befria kyrkan från förtröstan till osäkerhet. Motsättningen mellan 1593 och 1993 är den tyngsta bland många tänkvärda och viktiga slutsatser i Braws artikel.

Också Torbjörn Aronson, Hans Sundberg och Pavel Hoffman skriver tydlig teologihistoria. Aronson studerar luthersk teologi i Tyskland och hur den kom att påverka det sena 1800-talets Sverige. Bland de han behandlar är Gottfrid Billing. Aronson betonar att hos Billing hör den helige Ande, kyrkan och skriften ihop. Anden har skapat kyrkan och skriften och verkar fortfarande genom dem, inte minst genom att skapa bekännelseskrifterna. Billing är bara en av de teologer och riktningar som Aronson intressant beskriver. Ett tydligt faktafel har dock smugit sig in då Christopher Jacob Boström, professor i praktisk filosofi i Uppsala, omnämns som professor i praktisk teologi.

Boström förekommer också i Sundbergs artikel. Han hörde, tillsammans med Viktor Rydberg, till de fiender som de bibeltroende hade att försvara sig mot under 1800-talet. Sundberg börjar med att redogöra för tidens baptistsamfund, sedan pingströrelsen och de inom denna rörelse ledande personerna Sven Lidman och Lewi Pethrus. En tanke som levt in i nutiden, i alla fall i pingströrelsen, är den att bibelordets auktoritet leder till en förpliktelse att utöva kyrkotukt. Sundberg beskriver Lidman och Pethrus som väldigt olika. Lidman beskrivs som förkunnare och Pethrus som en reflekterande teolog. Om deras brytning, och om den på något sätt säger något om deras bibelsyn, får vi dock inte veta något.

Hoffman studerar bibelsynfrågan framför allt teologihistoriskt och med tyngdpunkt på 1900-talet. De två tänkare som, i hans mening, kombinerade visar på en rimlig och för andlig tillväxt nyttig bibelsyn är Carl Henry och Karl Barth, alltså en baptistisk och en reformert teolog. Historiskt talar Hoffman gärna om reformatorerna och om protestantismen i motsättning till romersk katolicism. Traditionen och den kyrkliga dogmutveck-

lingen ses som stående i strid med Bibelns ställning. Ska tron ha sitt fäste i traditionen eller i Bibeln? Den enskildes tro och roll i kyrkan blir enligt Hoffman förminskad i en katolsk kyrka till skillnad mot i en protestantisk.

Flera av författarna är tydligt mindre förtjusta i katolska kyrkan och dess lärosystem och framför allt den roll som traditionen där spelar. Flera av dem står också i eller nära rörelser som i Sverige är relativt nya och som har sina teologiska rötter i USA. ”Evangelikal” och ”evangelisk” är ord som förekommer i sin anglosaxiska betydelse. Ett annat exempel är hur Anders Gerdmar, med tydlig egen reservation, använder elva sidor åt att diskutera dispensationalismen, uppdelningen av tiden och Guds handlande i olika tidsåldrar, vilken växt fram på de brittiska öarna och framför allt kommit att bli av betydelse i USA. Dessa tankar är knappast relevanta för särskilt många kyrkor och teologer i Sverige, även om Gerdmar uppger att de under de senare decennierna spridits över världen.

Att problematiska tankar kan leta sig fram om bibelordet får förstås helt utan hjälp från tradition eller Kyrkans lära blir tydligt i Johnny Foglanders bidrag om Jesu dop. Under tiden fram till Jesu dop hade Jesus, om än Faderns Son av evighet, till den grad avstått från sina gudomliga egenskaper att Han endast fungerat som människa till dess att Hans dop medförde den helige Andes smörjelse. Foglanders slutsats är att allt gudomligt Jesus gör är den helige Andes verk: ”Det var Anden som tillförde det övernaturliga elementet i det Han gjorde.” Intressant är att denna tolkning av personen Jesus är besläktad med teologiska positioner utvecklade under samma tid som den historisk-kritiska metod som boken i stort är en kritik av. Det bör även noteras att denna förståelse ligger nära (i min mening, farligt nära) vissa gnostiska idéer.

Sammantaget finns i boken många tankeväckande resonemang. Än det ena och än det andra kan vara av intresse för olika personer sett till deras teologiska grund och intresse. Genomgående och ibland uttalat är att de temata som diskuteras till stor del handlar om den enskildes möte med den akademiska teologin och den historisk-kritiska bibeltolkningen. Rivs tron ned av den historisk-kritiska metoden, blir den starkare, förändras den, eller…? I denna mening blir bokens fråga personlig. Gud talar till den enskilde i bibelordet. Är teologin, och framför allt exegetiken, en nyttig hörapparat – eller en störsändare som mer eller mindre dränker tilltalet?

Martin Bergman
Teol. dr.
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28859

Fredrik Santell. *Att bygga sitt liv i skuggan av kriget. Heribert Jansson, en existentiell biografi*. Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2025. 286 s.

Det är nästan alltid roligt att läsa biografier. Extra roligt är det om man får lära känna en i vida kretsar numera tämligen okänd person som Heribert Jansson (1919–96), kyrkoherde för Svenska kyrkan i Berlin under nästan 40 år under den tid då Berlin var en delad stad och kalla kriget pågick. I sin samtid var han omsusad och omskriven – och också mycket omtyckt. En mångfacetterad person: gladlynt societetslejon och allvarlig själasörjare, en person som uppskattade ett bekvämt liv men som också tog risker för att smuggla ut såväl dokument som människor ur Östtyskland.

Denna spännande persons liv får vi ta del av i Fredrik Santells *Att bygga sitt liv i skuggan av kriget*. Santell är kyrkohistoriker, präst i Svenska kyrkan och författare till flera böcker. I inledningen berättar han om ett personligt möte han som ung teologistudent hade med den då 75-årige prästen i hans hem i Lund. Han kan ännu minnas ”den intresserade blicken, det hjärtliga handslaget och den stilla, reflekterande hållningen ” (s. 8), något som genomgående tycks ha kännetecknat Heribert Jansson. Det är ett gediget forskningsarbete Santell genomfört, och inte bara i ”arkivens underbara värld”; han har

därtill bokstavligen rest i Janssons fotspår, ätit på hans favoritrestauranger, till och med bott i hans lägenhet i Rom. Författarens entusiasm är uppenbar, och den smittar av sig på läsaren.

Heribert Janssons liv skildras kronologiskt, från uppväxten som adoptivbarn i en prästgård i Västergötland till ålderdom och död i Lund. Biografin är också en existentiell sådan: om de tankar och förhållningssätt till livets stora frågor som format hans liv. Det är i huvudsak tre områden författaren lyfter fram: religion, politik och sexualitet. Det var framför allt det sistnämnda som gjorde att han i vissa kyrkliga kretsar betraktades som kontroversiell. Han hade nämligen livet igenom starka emotionella och sexuella relationer till andra män. Santell väljer begreppet *queer* för att markera Janssons livsföring som ”bortom heteronormativa mönster” (s. 132).

Som kyrkoherde för den svenska församlingen i Berlin, Victoriaförsamlingen, tillträder Heribert Jansson 1950. Det är en svårt sargad stad han möter i det efterkrigstida Berlin. Något annat som kom att prägla livet i staden var förstås spänningen mellan öst och väst. Jansson lyckades ändå bygga upp en omfattande verksamhet i den svenska kolonin med olika evenemang med den stora julbasaren som årets höjdpunkt. Medierapporteringen tycks ha varit omfattande, och bland annat *Expressen* berättar, under rubriken ”Bekantas bekanta”, om ”den leende och framtidsvissa svenska kolonin […] och dess elegante och dandyartade kyrkoherde” (s. 82). Men det var inte bara festligheter. Han var också engagerad i hjälparbetet för sina församlingsbor i den krigshärjade staden.

Livet som kyrkoherde var krävande: att vara en entusiasmerande ledare för såväl Berlins svenska koloni som för den egna arbetsstyrkan, samt att upprätthålla diplomatiska kontakter med styrande, ockupationsmakter och lokalbefolkning. Lägg därtill predikningar varje söndag. En annan viktig uppgift var förstås att fungera som själasörjare, och Heribert Jansson var en omvittnat god lyssnare.

Frestelserna i det kosmopolitiska Berlin var många och lockande för en person med en så pass tung arbetsbörda. Toleransen mot alkoholkonsumtion var hög, och bastuklubbar för möten med andra män många. Tillgången till dessa nöjen ledde så småningom till en personlig kris. En blöt utekväll 1957 på en bar med tvivelaktigt rykte i sällskap med två unga män och med en kvaddad Jaguar som följd ledde till att kriminalpolisen och även svenska UD blandades in. Janssons förtroende som utlandsposterad kyrkoherde vacklade. Medarbetarna i församlingen, ”dyrgriparna” som han kallade dem, stöttade honom dock genom hela processen, vilket säger en del om hur uppskattad han var som arbetsledare.

Delvis som en följd av denna ”incident” med efterföljande process, förlovade sig Jansson med Gun Grossmann, församlingens sekreterare, och kom så småningom att leva ett stadgat, anständigt familjeliv – åtminstone utåt sett. Samtidigt fortsatte han att odla nära relationer med män, såväl känslomässigt som erotiskt. Detta var vida känt och accepterat inom församlingen. Att det var möjligt förklaras delvis med ”utlandsförsamlingen som kosmopolitisk miljö som inte alltid präglades av samma moraluppfattningar och praxis som i hemlandet och hemlandskyrkan” (s. 134). Gun och Heribert levde på många sätt skilda liv. De bodde under samma tak men i olika delar av prästbostaden. De tillbringade mycket tid var för sig, bland annat gjorde de resor på egen hand. En särskild fristad för Heribert blev den egna lägenheten i Rom där han kunde leva lite mer utsvävande. Gun accepterade arrangemanget men bara så länge makens agerande inte blev alltför publikt.

De kanske mest spännande händelserna, åtminstone för en betraktare utifrån, i Heribert Janssons liv var de som ledde till att han under tio år blev förbjuden att besöka Östtyskland. Fram till 1963 hade han, tack vare sitt diplomatpass, kunnat röra sig relativt obehindrat över gränsen och därmed kunnat leverera förnödenheter, böcker, kontanter och annat till församlingens medlemmar på

östsidan, dock under konstant, men ”diskret”, övervakning av den östtyska säkerhetstjänsten. Så småningom började han även hjälpa människor över gränsen. ”Mer än en gång fick jag packa in en förföljd medbroder i bakluckan på bilen och ta över honom”, berättar han (s. 170). Därmed ansågs han, av de östtyska myndigheterna, ha missbrukat sin diplomatiska immunitet och blev förklarad *persona non grata* i DDR.

Även om Heribert Jansson, föga förvånande, var en kontroversiell person, var han inte bara avhållen som vän och arbetskamrat utan tilldelades också flera utmärkelser av såväl tyska som svenska myndigheter, såsom regeringens medalj *Illis Quorum* och Konungens medalj i serafimerordens band.

I Santells bok ges en intressant, innehållsrik och initierad bild av ett viktigt stycke ”Svenska kyrkan i utlandet”-historia, något som författaren skrivit om tidigare. Jag rekommenderar boken för en intresserad, allmänbildad allmänhet, och på akademisk nivå även för studenter i Kyrkohistoria. Författaren anger delvis populärvetenskapliga ambitioner. Jag delar denna uppfattning men menar att läsningen ibland riskerar tyngas av en alltför omfattande detaljrikedom. Boken är dock, tack vare tydlig disposition och rubriksättning, korta kapitel och inte minst en sann berättarglädje, tämligen lättläst. Men kanske är den stora behållningen ändå att få ta del av och lära känna en personlighet som levt ett innehållsrikt liv och samtidigt framstår som genomsympatisk.

Lotta Knutsson Bråkenhielm
Teol. dr. i religionsfilosofi
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28860

Eric Metaxas. *Religionless Christianity – God's Answer to Evil*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Faith, 2024. 140 pp.

US-American theologian, author and radio host Eric Metaxas' *Religionless Christianity – God's Answer to Evil* deals with the age-old question of whether there is and should be a connection between religion and politics and what that connection should look like. Utilizing 20th century German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thought, Metaxas calls for a Christian faith that is lived actively and openly rather than relegated to the private sphere. Metaxas' previous bestselling biography of Bonhoeffer (*Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, 2011) was celebrated in evangelical circles and received numerous awards. It was, however, also harshly criticized, most importantly for its oversimplification of complex political and theological questions as well as exaggerated and ideological formulations. Critically examining his latest book is thus essential if we hope to make sense of Metaxas as a theologian, but also of the way in which his theology relates to the current political situation in the US.

Metaxas' argument departs from his criticism of the 'Christless' religion of the American church. This religion has drifted from its radicalness and turned into a secular faith which separates religious truth from the rest of reality, he claims. The primary reason for this development, as explicated in chapters 1–4, is the Protestant church's preoccupation with emphasizing our being saved by faith instead of works. In Martin Luther's theology, the idea of living out one's faith was lost, Metaxas explains, and the church has grown increasingly complacent since. Here, Metaxas begins to draw parallels to the German church of the early 1930's. The German church and Christians did not speak out against the national socialists, despite the threat that they posed to the church itself, and to the social and political order of early 20th century Europe. As Metaxas explains, they did not recognize their error before it was too late. An authoritarian state had formed which did not leave room for those with differing views. With its 'cancel culture' and attacks on free speech, the US-American state of 2024 resembles such authoritarianism, chapters 5–7 contend.

Returning to the utilization of Bonhoeffer's story, chapters 8–14 again argue for the necessity of a faith that is both trusting

and engaged. Just as Bonhoeffer decided to become a double agent in the Abwehr (the German military-intelligence service during Hitler's regime) and to become involved in the assassination attempts on Hitler, Metaxas calls on his fellow Christians to be courageous and to grow political in their faith. Only in doing so can today's 'idea that biblical orthodoxy and theology are no longer considered sacred and immutable but are now changing to the satanic spirit of the age' (p. 99) be fought. The vilification of nationalism and the idea that science disproves or opposes biblical faith are only some of the results of this strenuous spirit of progressiveness. Others are efforts towards a one-world government and towards ecumenism. This, the, according to Metaxas, third and likely final existential crisis in the history of America (the first two consisting of the American revolution and the Civil War), is a battle between good and evil. Only reflection on and fighting for the principles and values on which the US were founded may save the American church and American people.

The book provides an apt description of Bonhoeffer's problematization of the modern worldliness of the church and therewith an opportunity for much needed theological reflection on ways in which to live the Christian faith more openly and responsibly. Nevertheless, for several reasons, the book's argument is incoherent and its message problematic. Firstly, Metaxas' description of the historical events of early 20th century Germany is rather simplistic. Perhaps because of this simplification, Metaxas uses Nazi Germany as a cautionary tale, nevertheless arguing for a Christian faith that speaks up for nationalism. One cannot but see the irony.

Secondly, due to Metaxas' engaging with Bonhoeffer's life and story more than his theology, large parts of the book utilize Bonhoeffer's thought in a way that one can hardly imagine was intended. For example, Metaxas vilifies secularism based on a seeming confusion of the concept with atheism. Secularism does not assume that there is no God, as Metaxas claims (p. 116), but involves the idea that the state and church as institutions need to be separated. As most political theology after World War II, but more importantly Bonhoeffer himself contended, this separation is crucial for the Christian faith's ability to take a stance on political issues. Only if it stands outside the political arena is it able to scrutinize and criticize those who hold power in this world. Equally astonishing is Metaxas' criticism of ecumenism or a one-world religion, as he terms it, in the context of this book with its focus on Bonhoeffer. For ecumenism was one of the foremost goals of much of Bonhoeffer's work. This work and the connections and relationships he had built because of it were not least the reason for his attractiveness to the Abwehr.

Thirdly, the book leaves much to be desired from a scholarly point of view. Its tone veers into polemic rather than constructive critique. With its many rhetorical questions, dramatic language and charged formulations, it resembles a populist political commentary more than anything else. Most significantly, it seems as though Metaxas has abandoned the openness and adaptability that need to be the foundation of any theology. For as theologians we should be especially aware of the uncontrollability that characterizes our earthly existence and therewith of the fallibility of our knowledge. Theology needs to be eternally evolving, perpetually progressive. Bonhoeffer himself emphasized this time and time again, calling for a humble theology that is aware of creaturely errancy.

To sum up, the book's short chapters and sub-headings make the text easily read. Moreover, Metaxas' notable ability to make complex theological ideas comprehensible to laypeople in combination with his knowledgeability on Scripture, make the text approachable to a wide audience. Even though it sets out on the reasonable quest to establish a connection between politics and theology, however, the book makes of Bonhoeffer's theology something it is not. For the systematic and/or political theologian,

its content thus appears unproductive. And yet, in reconstructing Bonhoeffer's theology, Metaxas illustrates that any politically engaged theology risks being misunderstood or even misused if it does not make provisions against political ideology. At least for that, anyone working towards such a theology should be grateful.

Miriam Sünder
PhD in systematic theology
University of Gothenburg
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28861

Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift 102 (2026), 74–79
p-ISSN 0039-6761 e-ISSN 2003-6248
DOI: 10.51619/stk.v102i1.28865

STK Essä:

Platons främling

HANS RUIN

Enligt en vanlig uppfattning kan Platons verk delas in i tre huvudperioder, baserat på innehållsmässiga och stilistiska särdrag. Först skriver han de sokratiska dialogerna som inleds med *Försvarstalet* och som innefattar bland andra *Charmides*, *Eutyphron* och *Lysis*. De följs av en mittenperiod, där Sokrates fortfarande oftast står i centrum, men där Platon framträder tydligare bakom sin protagonist som tänkare i egen rätt. Först bland dessa mittendialoger kommer *Faidon*, som följs av *Gästabudet* och *Staten*. Till hans senare verk räknas bland andra *Sofisten*, *Theaiteos*, *Statsmannen*, *Timaios* och *Lagarna*. Här drivs den dialektiska abstraktionsnivån till nya nivåer. I flera av dem har Sokrates en mer undanskymd roll och i *Lagarna* förekommer han inte alls. Här möter vi istället en person som bara omnämns som ”Atenaren” och som bär många drag av Platon själv. Ett anmärkningsvärt inslag i de sena texterna är också en gestalt som bara omtalas som ”Främlingen från Elea”. Han dyker först upp i dialogen *Sofisten* och återkommer sedan i den narratologiskt och tidsmässigt omedelbart efterföljande *Statsmannen*. Tillsammans med *Theaitetos* bildar dessa tre dialoger en sammanhängande helhet, med delvis samma personer som möts under några dygn för samtal. Trilogin inleds med *Theaitetos*, som gestaltar ett samtal om kunskapens och sanningens väsen, vilket sedan följs av två samtal som försöker ringa in sofisten respektive statsmannen som mänskligt-intellektuella typer.

Sokrates finns med i alla dessa dialoger men det är bara i *Theaitetos* som han spelar en central roll som utfrågare av den unge man som givit namn åt dialogen. I de efterföljande två dialogerna låter Platon honom stiga åt sidan till förmån just för denne gåtfulle ”främling”, som leder samtalen. I *Sofis-*

ten diskuterar denne fortsatt med *Theaitetos*, medan det i *Statsmannen* sker med en annan yngre man som också bär namnet Sokrates, ”Sokrates den yngre”. Frågan om vad och vem denne främling egentligen är har sysselsatt uttolkarna genom historien. Vad betyder det att han inte ges ett namn, och vad betyder det att han är från Elea, där Parmenides och den så kallade eleatiska skolan hade sitt fäste? Varför väljer Platon att låta honom leda dessa viktiga samtal? Vems talan är det egentligen han för? Och varför omtalas han som ”främling”? Det grekiska ordet är *xenos*, vilket också kan ha innebörden ”gäst”. En *xenos* är någon som bör tas emot med gästfrihet. I Jan Stolpes översättningen förekommer han därför genomgående just bara som ”Gästen”. När han först presenteras av Theodoros i inledningen till *Sofisten* är det som ”en riktig filosof” och som någon som visserligen kommer från Elea, men som ändå inte är anhängare till Parmenides och Zenon. Sokrates frågar skämtsamt om det inte i själva verket är en gud som kommit till dem i förklädnad, på vilket Theodoros svarar att han inte tror det, men däremot att han är gudomlig ”…för så kallar jag alla filosofer”.[1]

Främlingen är alltså inte en av de många gestalter som dyker upp i Platons dialoger för att dialektiskt prövas och detroniseras av Sokrates. Tvärtom är han någon som hos Platon får representera de högsta filosofiska dygderna. Den inledande fråga som ställs till främlingen i början av *Sofisten* är vad som egentligen kännetecknar en sofist, en statsman och en filosof. De samtal som sedan följer i de två på varandra följande dialogerna iscensätter främlingens försök att ringa in sofisten och statsmannen. Någon separat utredning av vem filosofen egentligen är finns dock inte bevarad. Inte heller tycks Platon ha skrivit en sådan dialog, att döma av det antika källmaterialet. Med tanke på att det är denna uppgift som uttryckligen formuleras i det inledande samtalet ligger det nära till hands att, som Jan Stolpe och andra föreslagit, läsa de båda färdigställda dialogerna om sofisten och statsmannen som också indirekta gestaltningar av filosofen. Till skillnad från sofisten och statsmannen är filosofen inte någon vars väsen kan fixeras entydigt i en framställning; till sist kan han bara synliggöras performativt genom sin konst. I fallet med filosofen skulle man alltså kunna hävda att dialogen indirekt visar vem och vad han är genom främlingens förmåga att definiera de två andra gestalterna. Filosofen visar helt enkelt sitt väsen genom sin intellektuella praktik.

1 Alla citat från Platon är från Jan Stolpes svenska översättning: Platon, *Skrifter*, Bok 4 (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2006), enligt den internationella standardpaginering som finns i marginalen. Alla citat från Gaschés bok till svenska är mina, HR.

Om detta har den amerikansk-luxemburgiske filosofen Rodolphe Gasché skrivit en essä i tre kapitel, med titeln *Plato's Stranger*.[2] Gasche gjorde sig tidigt ett namn som inflytelserik introduktör av Derrida och dekonstruktionen i USA med boken *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* från 1986.[3] Senare har han skrivit om både Kant och Bataille, men i sin nu aktuella bok har nu den snart nittioårige författaren alltså återvänt till Platon och den antika filosofin. Och tvärtemot vad som kanske kunde förväntas är det inte med syfte att dekonstruera den västerländska logocentrismens urfader. Istället handlar det om att i en medskapande och inlevelsefull läsning visa hur redan Platon i sina sena dialoger i själva verket inleder ett tänkande som lämnar plats för det främmande, i polemik mot föregående enhetsläror. Hos Gasché framträder Platon rentav själv som något av en ur-dekonstruktör genom att i detta sena skede av sin tankeutveckling just kalla in en ”främling” för att undergräva den parmenidiska metafysiken. Gasché är medveten om att textens *xenos* också kan översättas som ”gäst” och alltså inte måste förstås som ”främling”. Men det är det *främmande* hos främlingen som särskilt upptar hans intresse. Som ingen annan före honom låter Gasché denna gestalt visa vägen mot en nyläsning av Platons sena filosofi. Det gäller även texter som inte explicit omnämner främlingen, som *Theaitetos*, vilket är den dialog som står i centrum för boken första kapitel. Där utvecklar Gasché en tolkning av textens två olika begrepp för annanhet – *allos* och *heteros* – som får peka fram mot främlingens ankomst i den omedelbart efterföljande *Sofisten*.

På så vis framträder ”främlingen” som ett chiffer som erbjuder en ny ingång till Platon som inte bara det *enas* utan också det *främmandes* filosof. I detta ligger förstås också en kritik mot alla de moderna kritiker som på olika sätt velat framställa Platon som en monologisk och auktoritär metafysiker. Hos Gasché får han istället framträda som en tidig försångare till modernitetens post-metafysiska tänkande och som en emancipatoriskt sinnad proto-demokrat som i det fria och öppna samspelet mellan olikheter ser det främsta samhällsskicket. I ett skede då hela den västerländska filosofiska traditionen stundtals tycks stå vid skranket rycker på så vis denne åldrade dekonstruktör in för att återvinna dess latenta radikalitet vid roten. Det är en fascinerande läsning som rymmer flera nya ingångar mot de texter han tar sig an, om än till priset av vissa förenklingar.

Nyckelscenen kring vilken hela bokens argument är byggt är den passage i *Sofisten* (241d) då Främlingen/Gästen vänder sig till Theaitetos och föreslår

2 Rodolphe Gasché, *Plato's Stranger*, Binghamton: Suny Press, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781438490359.

3 Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986, https://doi.org/10.2307/2185309.

att ”vi måste pröva fader Parmenides tes och tvinga fram att det som inte är i ett visst avseende är”. Bakgrunden är en lång föregående diskussion om vad för slags skenbilder och verklighetsförvanskningar som sofisterna ägnar sig åt. Det är för att komma vidare i denna kritiska diskussion som han här öppnar sig för en djupare problematisering av både varat och icke-varat. I grund och botten handlar problemet om hur vi ska förstå och tänka tillblivelse och förändring. För att få grepp om dessa fenomen behöver tänkandet lämna bakom sig de äldre filosofernas olika enhetsläror. I en annan ofta citerad passage säger Främlingen/Gästen om Parmenides och de andra föregångarna att de ”drar en historia för oss som om vi vore barn” (242c). Men det är särskilt en kommentar som Gasché tagit fasta på i denna del av dialogen, nämligen när Främlingen/Gästen lite skämtsamt vänder sig till Theaitetos och, apropå kritiken mot Parmenides, säger att han inte får tro ”att jag håller på att bli nåt slags fadermördare” (241d). Det är nämligen just som en sådan ”fadermördare” som Gasché här framställer Platon, då han genom Främlingen ställer hela den föregående filosofiska traditionen till svars. Vad resonemangen så småningom utmynnar i är en filosofi ”i vilken icke-varat, snarare än att beteckna motsatsen till varat, nämligen det som absolut inte är, benämner det som är annat än varat”.[4] Genom att den strikta skillnaden mellan vara och icke-vara upphävs pekar det fram emot hur ”möjligheten av skillnad och annanhet kan uppkomma”. Inget är längre rätt och slätt i kraft av sig självt, utan bara i relation till något annat och främmande.

För Gasché är det av avgörande betydelse att detta nya synsätt presenteras via någon som själv är ”främmande”. Det skulle med andra ord inte vara en tillfällighet att Platon för in det främmandes kategori på detta sätt i en diskussion om varats natur. Genom att låta sin filosofi uttalas av en främling visar han på vikten av att släppa in det främmande. För Gasché pekar det framåt mot Levinas och Derrida och deras tankar om ”den andre” (*autrui*). Införandet av Främlingen/Gästen öppnar på så vis ”möjligheten av en relation till alteritet”[5] och en ”filosofi om den andre”.[6] I *Sofisten* sker således inte bara en ”öppning mot tanken på främlingens tänkande utan själva tanken om det främmande inom det grekiska tänkandet”.[7] Därmed skulle Platon, genom sitt fadermord, vara någon som “radikalt destabiliserar den grekiska själv-identiteten”.

Tolkningen av *Statsmannen*, som upptar bokens tredje kapitel, utvecklar denna grundtes i en mer uttalat politisk riktning. I samtalet mellan Främlingen/Gästen och ”den unge Sokrates” handlar det mycket om att vända

4 Gasché, *Plato's Stranger*, 88.
5 Gasché, *Plato's Stranger*, 98.
6 Gasché, *Plato's Stranger*, 104.
7 Gasché, *Plato's Stranger*, 108.

och vrida på textens två centrala metaforer, som är ”herden” och ”vävaren”. Det ligger nära till hands att se statsmannen som en herde som håller samman en flock, men efter hand framträder han snarare genom bilden av någon som väver samman en gemenskap, inte av boskap utan av fria människor. Genom Främlingen/Gästen tar Platon här tydligt avstånd från bilden av statsmannen som ett slags överordnad husbonde. Statskonst är inte hushållskonst. Det handlar nämligen inte bara om att utöva en vertikal hierarkisk makt, utan om att få jämbördiga varelser att samverka. Gradvis framträder att den som har förmågan att få denna väv av olikartade delar att bilda en levande helhet måste ha speciella förmågor som stundtals framstår som gudomliga eller demoniska.

I vissa avsnitt kan det se ut som om den ideala statsmannen smälter samman med idealbilden av en filosof. Men då är det viktigt att notera vad även Gasché lyfter fram, nämligen hur statskonsten på åtminstone en väsentlig punkt skiljer sig från filosofin. Den är nämligen inte ett teoretiskt vetande utan en praktisk förmåga att visa besinning och omdöme. Det visar sig särskilt i förmågan att agera klokt i det enskilda fallet, och speciellt när det gäller att tillämpa lagen. Allt detta leder honom så småningom fram till slutsatsen att det system som Främlingen/Gästen här förespråkar är en form av demokrati där människor frivilligt kommer samman för att gemensamt styra sig själva. Statsmannakonst är i denna mening en form av högre praktiskt medborgarskap, vilket Gasché framhåller i en kritik mot Arendt och andra som porträtterat Platon som en alltför teoretiskt orienterad politisk tänkare. Vad Platon till sist genom Främlingen/Gästen ger oss i sin dialog är i själva verket en tidigare ”okänd föreställning om en demokratisk grund för en politisk gemenskap”.[8]

Gasché framställer själv sin slutsats som en ”vågad hypotes”. Men snarare än en hypotes kan det ses som en läsart, som utgår från och betonar vissa inslag i texten. Argumentet hade blivit ännu mer övertygande om det hade knutits till det Platon några år senare utarbetar som sitt tyngst vägande bidrag till den politiska filosofin, nämligen den mycket mer omfattande dialogen *Lagarna*. Där förekommer som sagt varken Sokrates eller någon Främling, däremot en ”Atenare”. *Lagarna* visar upp Platon i en mer komplex gestalt som politisk filosof. Det är varken ett program för en radikal demokrati eller något slags elitistisk filosof-utopi, som i den tidigare *Staten*. Men det visar hur han in i det sista var upptagen av politisk-filosofiska problem, framför allt av vad som kännetecknar bärkraftiga och rättvisa statsbildningar. Hoten mot en stat finns hela tiden, både i form av tyranni och upplösning och inbördes strid. För Platon bestod den politiska filosofins

8 Gasché, *Plato's Stranger*, 161.

huvudsakliga uppgift i att tänka fram ett system som kunde undvika båda dessa fallgropar. Det handlar om hur både klokhet och kompetens kan säkras inom ett politiskt system för att skydda det mot sig självt. Hans lösning på detta problem är inte eliternas tyranni. Tvärtom såg han vikten av frihet inom varje politiskt system. I det avseendet har Gasché rätt i att Platons verk bär på en demokratisk grundimpuls, trots att han var kritisk mot den renodlade demokratin som styrsystem.

Sammantaget är boken en sympatisk om än bitvis lite onödigt tillkrånglad utläggning av Platon som både en traditionskritisk och frihetlig tänkare. Att det är en Främling/Gäst som får leda samtalet är fascinerande att tänka över, även om det är inte uppenbart att det hänger samman med textens innehåll på det sätt som Gasché föreslår. Ifrågasättandet av äldre auktoriteter är inte något nytt som Platon och hans Främling/Gäst för in i den grekiska filosofiska kulturen. En sådan kritiskt rivaliserande hållning präglar även flera av de föregående filosofiska författarna. Det gäller inte minst Parmenides själv, som visserligen utsätts för ett ”fadermord” hos Platon, men som själv var en fadermördare om vi ser till hur han i sin lärodikt gestaltar en uppgörelse med föregångaren Hesiodos.[9] I fallet Herakleitos är det ännu tydligare. Han vänder sig uttryckligen inte bara mot Hesiodos utan även mot Hekataios och Pythagoras och mot självaste Homeros.[10] Den stridbara detronisering av traditionen som Gasché lyfter fram som något nytt i Platons *Sofisten* är i det avseendet snarare en dimension hos det filosofiska tänkandets etos från början.

Även om Gasché på så vis stundtals driver sin övergripande tes lite för långt är detta en både tankeväckande och angelägen bok. Den påminner om vilket radikalt anslag som ryms i detta outsinliga verk, samtidigt som det visar upp dess fortsatta politiska-filosofiska relevans. Liksom den filosof som Platon själv till sist undviker att försöka fånga och låsa in i en bestämd gestalt, är Platons egna texter en levande och öppen tankerymd där den mottagliga läsaren kan fortsätta att förlora och återfinna sig på nytt. ▲

9 För en längre analys av Parmenides i detta hänseende, se min essä ”Svalget: Hesiodos, Parmenides och varats poetik” i *Aiolos* 80-81 (under utg. 2026).

10 Se *Herakleitos Fragment*, övers. Håkan Rehnberg & Hans Ruin, Stockholm: Faethon, 2023, bland annat fragmenten 40 och 42.

Till redaktionen insänd litteratur

Arne Bugge Amundsen, Daniel Lindmark och Tarald Rasmussen (red.). *Präster i norr under tidigmodern tid.* Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2025. 383 s.

Bonaventure. *Själens resa in i Gud. En vägbeskrivning över människans vandring i Guds värld.* Övers. och komm. Peder Bergqvist. Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2025. 273 s.

Daniel Wihlborg (red.). *Nicaea 1700 år. En jubileumsbok.* Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2025. 139 s.

Erika Boije. *En ny luthersk nation. Ideal och motbilder i 'Fältskärns berättelser' av Zacharias Topelius* [diss.]. Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2025. 324 s.

Madeleine Fredell OP. *En kort introduktion till katolsk sociallära*. Stockholm: Veritas. 2025. 171 s.

Markus Asketen. *Om det heliga dopet.* Övers. och inledning Mikael Sundkvist. Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2025. 76 s.

Karin Johannesson. *Det goda livets beskydd. Om de tio budorden som rättesnören för ett gott liv*. Stockholm: Katedralakademin. 2025. 45 s.

Susanne Wigorts Yngvesson & Mia Lövheim (red.). *12 kvinnors kallelse*. Stockholm: Verbum. 2025. 270 s.