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Solov'ëv and Schelling's Philosophy of Revelation

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The connection between Solov'ev's philosophy of religion and Schelling's has long been recognized but is difficult to clarify for two reasons. The first is Solov'ev's nonchalance about citing sources. The paucity of direct references to Schelling in the work of a philosopher who has been called 'the last and most outstanding Russian Schellingian' is quite astonishing. The second reason is the ambivalence toward Schelling in Russian religious philosophy. At an early point it became commonplace to associate Schelling with 'pantheism', a tendency perceived as dangerous on both theological and humanistic grounds: theologically because of the contradiction to creatio ex nihilo, humanistically because of the threat to human freedom posed by world-process determinism. Solov'ev's philosophical heirs, eager to save the master from these pitfalls, sought to distance him from Schelling even as they conceded his debt to the great idealist. Evgenij Trubeckoj, whose massive study of 1913 charted the course of Solov'ev studies for years to come, distinguished between 'the sunlight of the genuine Absolute' in Solov'ev and the 'clouds' that obscured it, namely, the 'pantheistic tendencies of Russian-Schellingian gnosticism' and the 'semi-Schellingian forms of Cletnia o Bogocelovecestve [Lectures on Godmanhood]'. More radical critics, such as Lev Šestov, rejected most of Solov'ev's mature thought as fatally compromised by pantheism and affirmed the Solov'evian legacy only on the basis of an apocalypticist and fideist reading of Tri razgovora. Sergej Bulgakov was something
of an exception to the rule. In Filosofija khozajstva (1912) he worked out a cultureology which may be called Neo-Schellingian tout court. In Svet neverenij (1917), on the other hand, he showed sensitivity to anti-Schellingian polemics by taking a more guarded approach.\(^4\)

Of course there was more than one Schelling, at least as far as the convenient fictions of history of philosophy are concerned. In his doctoral defence of Kritika orlivennikh nacal, Solov’ev distinguished between ‘the speculative pantheism of the first Schellingian system (Identitiitsphilosophie) and the theosophical constructions of the second Schellingian system (the so-called positive philosophy)’. He acknowledged the ‘affinity of his views’ with the second system, ‘in which [Schelling] had already freed himself from the false pantheism of his earlier theories’.\(^5\) Bulgakov, too, considered Philosophie der Offen­barung to be Schelling’s ‘most accomplished and fully articulated sys­tem’, although he did not believe that Schelling had distanced himself sufficiently from pantheist rationalism even in that late work.\(^6\) Yet the ‘two-Schelling hypothesis’ clarifies little besides the determination to combat ‘pantheism’. To grasp Solov’ev’s link to Schelling in substantive terms one must examine the overall structure of his thought.

The issue of Solov’ev’s debt to Schelling is critical for situating Solov’ev in the history of modern religious thought. Schelling’s ‘philos­ophy of revelation’ has been a major force in theology and religious phi­losophy although its significance has been underestimated, just as Schelling’s contribution to philosophy in general has been undervalued. Andrew Bowie writes suggestively of these relationships in his discus­sion of Schelling’s rejection of the ontological proof:

> If one takes the ontological proof of God as the classic example of the metaphysics of presence (which is the basic point of Schelling’s critique), then it is evident that the rejection of that proof leads to two possibilities. The first is a different approach to theology, of the kind evident in the way that Schelling tries to construct a philosophy of revelation rather than a rational theology. This attempt still lives on in theology of the kind developed by Rosenzweig, Paul Tillich and others. The second possibility is that

\(^4\) Unlike Solov’ev, Bulgakov documented his reading in the sources. The text of Svet neverenij makes it clear that this work was guided in part by a careful reading of Schelling’s Philosophie der Offen­barung. See the well-annotated edition by V.V. Sapov and K.M. Dolgov in the series ‘Mysliateli XX veka’ (Moskva, 1994).


\(^6\) See neverenij, ed. Sapov and Dolgov, p. 129.
Besides Tillich and Rosenzweig one could name others, notably Martin Buber, whose dialogical principle relies more heavily on the Schellingian dialectic of spirit and nature than has generally been recognized. The question at hand is whether Solov’ev’s name should be added to this list as well. To answer in the affirmative means that Solov’ev’s thought should be studied not just in its own terms, nor in the context of Russian thought alone, but in relation to the work of the non-Russian and non-Orthodox thinkers just mentioned; in other words, that Solov’ev’s religious philosophy should be seen as part of a larger project of theological discourse in modern times.

What is philosophy of revelation? The phrase is sometimes used, as by Bowie in the passage cited, as a label for Schelling’s philosophy of religion as a whole, although strictly speaking it refers to only one phase of the project. Schelling’s ‘positive philosophy’ begins with a speculative ontology (the three ‘potencies’ of being), moves next to ‘philosophy of mythology’, and only then to philosophy of revelation, by which Schelling means philosophical elucidation of the theological content of Judaism and Christianity. Whether philosophy of revelation points beyond itself to an idealist religion of the future is a debatable question to which I shall return.

The point of philosophy of revelation is to overcome the polarization between traditional dogmatic theology and modern critical anti-theology by offering a new way of conceptualizing the reality of God:

Der wahre Gott ist der lebendige; lebendig ist, was über sein Sein verfügt; lebendig ist der Gott, der aus eigener Macht aus sich herausgeht, sein Anderes von sich in seinem unvordenklichen Sein wird; verschiedene von dem Sein, in dem er es sei, Gott ohne diese Macht denken, heisst ihn der Möglichkeit jeder Bewegung berauben. Dann müssten (nach Spinoza) die Dinge aus Gott emanieren (schlechter Pantheismus); oder man müsste mit Voraussetzung eines freien intelligenten Welturhebers versichern: Die Schöpfung sei unbegreiflich! (Schaller ‘Theismus’.)

Schelling’s ontology, or Potenzlehre, is an elaborate gloss on the idea stated here that God has the power to posit something other than himself within his own being. The crux of this conceptuality is the transition —
the word is too mild for what could be called a theogonic catastrophe — from the first to the second potency or degree in the life of God. The unfathomable, radically indeterminate ground of being, pure possibility [das an-sich-Seiende, das sein Könntende], admits the necessity of determine being by positing pure actuality [das außer-sich-Seiende, das sein Müßende] over against itself. The third potency is the power to overcome the alienation between the first and the second, the harmonization of being in a symphonic whole [das bei-sich-Seiende, das sein Sollende].

As Schelling construes it, the history of religion reflects the dynamics of the potencies. The active principle is always the second, the principle of concreteness or determinate being; but the forms of its activity vary according to the point which has been reached in the revelatory process. Mythological religion is the product of the second potency while still in the shadow of the first; it is the religion of irrational nature struggling for liberation. Revealed religion is this liberation, the self-clarification of the second potency as free personal being, historically realized in Jewish, Islamic and Christian monotheism. The Potenzenlehre finds the widest possible application in the Schellingian tradition, where it serves as a template for organizing almost any subject matter in theological terms. The pervasiveness of this scheme in the wide-ranging theology of Paul Tillich, for example, has been convincingly demonstrated. The drama of estrangement and reconciliation at the core of Tillich’s Systematic Theology as well as the familiar Tillichian triads of love, power and justice, and of heteronomy, autonomy and theonomy, can be traced back to Schelling’s potencies.


A good deal of evidence can be marshaled to show that religious philosophy presents an analog of Schelling’s theogonic catastrophe — from the fundamental themes which will already appear in this work; a simple, is here the basis of the history of the Christian idea of the divine incarnation, the latter by the Spirit here receives its underpinning symbolism of masculinity.

The Schellingian potencies appear in the Christian Incarnation / Spirit.

Solov’ev’s earliest sophiological writings contain references to Schelling’s potencies, although Solov’ev mentions Schelling only by name, never cites a work by Schelling. La Russie et l’Église Universelle is composed of conwonic and historical processes description of ‘all extradivine existence’, which process of universal history and ‘the perfect woman, or diviniced nature, the perfect society of God with human integration of divine Wisdom’. This triple incarnation in Christian terms, recapitulates Schelling’s project of religion: mythology (divinized nature), the perfect society of God with human beings, and the perfect society of God with human beings in the incarnation, with artistic creativity. The knowledge of the unconditional reality of things, discloses the ideas of things through an act of imagination.


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to the Schellingian potencies.\textsuperscript{11}
ology in English see Edward Allen Beach,
osophy of Mythology (Albany, New York,
of God, as the active element throughout the his-
struction of the History of Religion in
Propositions and Principles, trans. with intro. and
r, 1974), p. 103; and Philosophie der Offen
by Manfred Schelter, vol. 6 (München, 1928).
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ich's earliest sophiological writings follow the same scheme,
though Solov'ev mentions Schelling by name only twice in eighty
pages and never cites a work by Schelling.\textsuperscript{11} The mature sophiology of
La Russie et l'Eglise Universelle is comparable. The aim of the cos-
mogonic and historical processes described there is 'the universal inte-
gration of all extradivine existence', which is accomplished through 'the
process of universal history' and 'the triple fruit which it bears: the per-
fect woman, or divinized nature, the perfect man or the God-man, and
the perfect society of God with human beings — the definitive incarna-
tion of divine Wisdom'.\textsuperscript{14} This triple incarnation, while Solov'ev glosses it
in Christian terms, recapitulates Schelling's construction of the history
of religion: mythology (divinized nature), revelation (God-man), Spirit
(Church).

Močul'skij's observations on the Schellingian 'echoes' of Solov'ev's
epistemology in Kritika orvlečených náčel are à propos here. Like
Schelling, Solov'ev construed the production of knowledge on the ana-
logy with artistic creativity. The knowledge seeker begins with faith in
the unconditional reality of things, discovers the determinate forms or
ideas of things through an act of imagination and puts flesh on these
\textsuperscript{12} Maxime Herman, \textit{Vie et œuvre de Vladimir Soloviev} (Fribourg, 1995), p. 24. See
also the discussion of 'The Mythological Process in Ancient Paganism' in Jonathan Sut-
ton, \textit{The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev: Towards a Reassessment} (New
\textsuperscript{13} See \textit{La Sophia et les autres écrits français}, ed. François Roueff (Lausanne, 1978),
pp. 380.
forms through creative activity. The three-fold scheme of unconditional being, determinate being, and reconciliation through creative spirit appears once again. Močul’skij goes on to allege that Solov’ëv preserves human freedom more effectively than Schelling, because Solov’ëv confines the scheme to epistemology rather than extending it to the cosmogonic arena, where the human person is in danger of being swallowed up by the world-process. Whether this distinction is fair to Schelling need not detain us here.66

Močul’skij inadvertently reveals another similarity between Solov’ëv and Schelling in his discussion of Solov’ëv’s theory of ideas. Močul’skij construes Solov’ëv’s theory as an inverted Platonism:

In Plato the appearance of the object produces the recollection of its idea sleeping in the human soul; in Solov’ëv it is the other way around: the idea living in the soul makes possible the perception of the object. In [Plato] the movement is from below to above, de realibus ad realia, while in [Solov’ëv] the movement is from above to below, de realis ad reales. The human being responds to the condescension of the idea through his own creative activity. Thus, the process of cognition in Solov’ëv is shown to be a divine-human process.67

Solov’ëv’s view as described by Močul’skij could be characterized as a ‘kenotic’ theory of ideas. This, in turn, connects Solov’ëv to Schelling because the latter was a major source of the kenosis-theology which came to play a significant role in nineteenth and twentieth-century European theology, including Russian Orthodox theology. In the theogonic process as described in Philosophie der Offenbarung, the second potency — the Idea, the Son — sets itself off from the first by assuming what Schelling calls the ‘servitude’ of determinate being, the ‘necessity’ of logical forms. Schelling lends this theory biblical authority through an excerpt of Philippians 2:6-8.68

Čtenija o Bogocelovecestve is clearly dependent on Philosophie der Offenbarung. The literary genre is the same (čtenija, Vorlesungen). The term ‘revelation’ is used in the specifically Schellingian sense to mean

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15 K. Močul’ski, Vladimir Solov’ëv: Svoi idei (Paris, 1951), pp. 114-115. Sutton probably speaks for most scholars of the subject when he notes (pace Močul’ski) that the problem of freedom and world-process ‘deeply concerned’ Schelling, and that Russian thinkers such as Solov’ëv and Benjajev simply followed him in this respect. See The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solov’ëv, p. 68.


that which remains as the ground of religious proofs of God have fallen away.69

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19 Frederick C. Coppleston points out the Schellingian ‘second Absolute’ in God in Philosophy in Russia (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1986), pp. 223-4, citing The phraseology first/second Absolute is Coppleston and ‘positing’ [positen] or ‘aspect’ [aspekt] of the

the process of cognition in Solov'ev is shown above to below, identically settled, for the following reason: it is clearly dependent on Philosophie der Offenbarung. The three-fold scheme of unconditioned, and reconciliation through creative spirit as expected: mythological religion (‘natural revelation’) followed by the vindication of freedom, first through the ‘negative revelation’ of Buddhism and other Indian religions, then through the ‘positive revelation’ mediated by Platonism and biblical religion culminating in Christianity, the religion of bogocelovecestvo [Godmanhood]. Bogocelovecestvo itself is a version of the Schellingian proposition that the living God, as opposed to abstract divinity, must contain otherness within himself. The notion of the eternal humanity of God, which is what bogocelovecestvo is about, supplies this alterity.

One of the critical issues in Schellingian philosophy of revelation concerns the destiny of the world-process. What can be expected from the status of Christian revelation in Schelling’s philosophy of religion. As Thomas F. O’Meara puts it: ‘If Christianity was the future of mythology, is not idealism the future of Christianity?’ This question is not easily settled, for the following reason: the final stage of the theogonic process, the activity of the third potency in cosmic resolution, is not described at length [in Philosophie der Offenbarung]. What is missing is an idealist ontology of resolution which would correspond to the first part of the positive philosophy, the lectures on the one primal Being leading into the philosophy of religion. Schelling’s philosophical imagination seems to have been spent. Distracted by two material segments which excited his curiosity — Satanic theory and an ecumenical ecclesiology — Schelling deprived his linear process of a worthy conclusion.

It is illuminating to apply O’Meara’s observations to Solov’ev’s oeuvre. Would it be true to say that ‘idealism is the future of Christianity’ for Solov’ev? The concept of bogocelovecestvo often appears to be directed to such an end, not just in the early Solov’ev, but in his late works as that which remains as the ground of religious knowledge after the classical proofs of God have fallen away. The scheme of religious evolution is as expected: mythological religion (‘natural revelation’) followed by the vindication of freedom, first through the ‘negative revelation’ of Buddhism and other Indian religions, then through the ‘positive revelation’ mediated by Platonism and biblical religion culminating in Christianity, the religion of bogocelovecestvo [Godmanhood]. Bogocelovecestvo itself is a version of the Schellingian proposition that the living God, as opposed to abstract divinity, must contain otherness within himself. The notion of the eternal humanity of God, which is what bogocelovecestvo is about, supplies this alterity.

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well. In *Tri razgovora*, for example, Mr. Z. is introduced as the protagonist of an ‘unconditional-religious’ point of view, transcending the ‘conventional-religious’ and ‘cultured-progressive’ views of the General and the Statesman.23 It is tempting to construe the trio of interlocutors in terms of the three-fold schema of the philosophy of revelation: the irrational absolute (the General’s piety), the irredendibly human (the Statesman’s humanitarianism) and the reconciliation prophesied by Mr. Z. (idealist religion), the last fulfilling Schelling’s dream of ‘vollkommene Verschmelzung des Christentums mit der allgemeinen Wissenschaft und Erkenntnis’.

Yet the case is not so neat. In his assessment of the denouement of Schelling’s *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, O’Meara seems to assume that Schelling would have done well to steer clear of such ‘distractions’ as ecumenism and the problem of evil. If an absolute idealist synthesis were the aim of philosophy of revelation, O’Meara’s criticism would probably be just. But is this the aim? Or, on the contrary, is it possible to imagine an outcome to which Schelling’s interests in ecumenism and the problem of evil would not be seen as irrelevant?

The same question may be asked about Solov’ev’s career. After Čtenija o Bogoceloivoestven Solov’ev could be said to have allowed himself to be ‘distracted’ by theocratic and ecumenical concerns. But were these concerns distractions, or were they a continuation of the philosophy of revelation by another path, namely the path of actual religious life? If, as philosophy of revelation holds, the living God is revealed through the history of religion, does the philosopher of revelation not have to get his hands into the stuff of religion in practice, not just in theory, in order to accomplish his task? If so, one can read Solov’ev’s prophetic activism of the 1880s as nothing less than a second philosophy of revelation. What the second added to the first was precisely seriousness about the claims of historic religion embodied in scriptures, dogmas and churches. The necessarily fragmentary character of philosophy of revelation in this mode turns out to be a virtue in that it reflects the unfinished character of the historical-revelatory process. A philosophy of revelation that was too determinate about the third ‘potency’ would in fact undermine itself.

In Solov’ev the issue of closure comes to a head. As is well known, the assessment of this work is one of the most studied.24 For the purposes of this paper, I will be concerned with the relationship between *Tri razgovora* and the conclusions of *Philosophie der Offenbarung*. Both works end with the same phrase and ecumenist prophecy. The ecumenism are close enough to suggest a direct influence. The ecumenist vision at the conclusion of *Philosophie der Offenbarung* is based on the theory of the historical-revelatory process. According to Schelling, the Universal churches of Peter, Paul and John—churches of world-historical *eikonostasia* in revelation—are to be found at the end. Peter’s is the church of stability, of ‘the spirit of stability’; Paul’s is the church of freedom, movement; and John’s is the church of the future, of reconciliation and humanity.25 Obviously the Potestenlehre is based on the theory of the historical-revelatory process, but there is a practical dimension to it. To complete the scheme to justify the ecumenical project of Pantheism and Protestantism, a project of which Schelling was aware, he believed it was destined to be accomplished by an idealist working in Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. In this sense, ecumenical ideal. A spiritually tinged factor:

In Deutschland werden sich die Schicksale des deutschen Volkes mit solchen der Welt verbinden, so dass das deutsche Volk ist anerkannt als das der kommenden Zukunft, das der Welt gerecht wird.26 For the purposes of this paper, I will be concerned with the relationship between *Tri razgovora* and the conclusions of *Philosophie der Offenbarung*. Both works end with the same phrase and ecumenist prophecy. The ecumenism are close enough to suggest a direct influence. The ecumenist vision at the conclusion of *Philosophie der Offenbarung* is based on the theory of the historical-revelatory process. According to Schelling, the Universal churches of Peter, Paul and John—churches of world-historical *eikonostasia* in revelation—are to be found at the end. Peter’s is the church of stability, of ‘the spirit of stability’; Paul’s is the church of freedom, movement; and John’s is the church of the future, of reconciliation and humanity.25 Obviously the Potestenlehre is based on the theory of the historical-revelatory process, but there is a practical dimension to it. To complete the scheme to justify the ecumenical project of Pantheism and Protestantism, a project of which Schelling was aware, he believed it was destined to be accomplished by an idealist working in Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. In this sense, ecumenical ideal. A spiritually tinged factor:

25 Another way of putting it is to say that faith does not wither away as philosophy of revelation advances but remains indispensable to the end. As Walicki has noted, an ambivalence about faith in philosophy of revelation was noted early in the Russian reception of Schelling. ‘Although the Slavophi- 

28 ‘Geist der Menschheit’ in the Paulus-Nachdruck of *Philosophie der Offenbarung*; see *Philosophie der Offenbarung* 1841/42, ed. Frank, p. 321.
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According to Schelling, the Universal Church is composed of the churches of Peter, Paul and John — churches which are distinct in the world-historical *oikonomia* of revelation but destined for unity in the end. Peter's is the church of stability, antiquity, continuity, the Real. Paul's is the church of freedom, movement, criticism, the Ideal. John's is the church of the future, of reconciliation and unity, of 'the spirit of humanity'. Obviously the _Potenzenlehre_ underlies this ecclesiology, but there is a practical dimension to it as well. Schelling designed the scheme to justify the ecumenical project of reconciling Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, a project of world-historical importance which he believed was destined to be accomplished in Germany. As a Protestant idealist working in Roman Catholic Bavaria, Schelling had personal and professional reasons for being drawn to this rendition of the ecumenical ideal. A spiritually tinged German patriotism was also a factor:

In Deutschland werden sich die Schicksale des Christentums entscheiden; das deutsche Volk ist anerkannt als das universellste; lange Zeit auch galt es für das wahrheitsliebendste, das der Wahrheit alles, selbst seine politische Receptiön of Schelling. Although the Slavophiles approved of Schelling, Kireevsky criticized the philosophy of revelation for confining itself to a merely negative critique of rationalism. The dilemma, as he saw it, was that a new, positive philosophy required true religious faith, whereas Western Christianity was itself infected by rationalism. Although Schelling was aware of this, and had attempted to cleanse Christianity of the deposits of rationalism, it was 'lamentable task to invent a faith for oneself':


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Bedeutung zum Opfer gebracht hat. Im deutschen Reich haben die alte Kirche und das neue Bekenntnis neben einander mit gleichen politischen Rechten existiert. Eine spätere Veränderung hat sie nicht bloß im Ganzen, sondern auch in jedem einzelnen Teil Deutschlands mit völlig gleichen Rechten nebeneinander gestellt. Dies ist nicht umsonst geschehen, sondern an sich selbst das Vorzeichen einer neuen, höheren Entwicklung. 29

The Orthodox Church has no place in Schelling's scheme. He mentions it only long enough to deny Orthodoxy any independent testimony to bring to the altar of the Universal Church. 30 The effect of this is to leave the Johannine church without a link to history or the present-day world, to construe it as pure futurity. Solov'ev's version of Schelling's scheme rectifies this problem by identifying Orthodoxy as the bearer of the Johannine principle, although the prophetic, future-oriented vocation of Orthodoxy is affirmed at the same time. That is to say, Solov'ev has ideal, not empirical Orthodoxy in mind in 'Kratkaja povest' ob antikhriste'. In Solov'ev as in Schelling, however, the church of the future is realized through the Johannine principle. In 'Kratkaja povest' 31 it is starets Ioann who initiates the reunion of the churches in the Judean desert. Solov'ev's vision of the fratemization and co-rule of Christians and Jews in the end-time following the fall of Antichrist also follows Schelling. Schelling maintained that the apostle John, unlike Peter and Paul, pastored (in Ephesus) a mixed Jewish and Gentile church, a token of the Universal Church of the future until the Jewish and Christian elements of the church are reconciled. 32

Solov'ev's rendition of Schelling's scheme in Tri razgovora steers it away from purely idealist religion, an outcome that could not be accepted by the bearers of historic Christianity or Judaism. Among Solov'ev's heirs, too, one sees an effort to steer clear of such result. This is especially clear in Bulgakov, who remained a Solov'evian idealist to the end of his days but devoted his energies in the last two decades of his life to dogmatic theology. Bulgakov's dogmatics should be appreciated not just as an interest resulting from his ordination to the priesthood, but as the natural continuation of a philosophy of revelation. A philosophy of revelation that left no place for dogmatics, in effect subordinating dogmatics to idealism, would be unsatisfactory because it would steer positive philosophy back in the direction of

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Hegelian intellectualism and so destroy it. In other words, there is philosophic as well as poetic truth in Solov'ev's decision to give the last word in his philosophy of revelation to three churchmen in the desert and an army of unassimilated Jews.

P. VALLIERE

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vol. 6, p. 712; cf. Philosophie der Offenbarung


cr, vol. 6, pp. 719-20.