Poetic Imagination in the Speculative Philosophies of Plato, Schelling, and Whitehead

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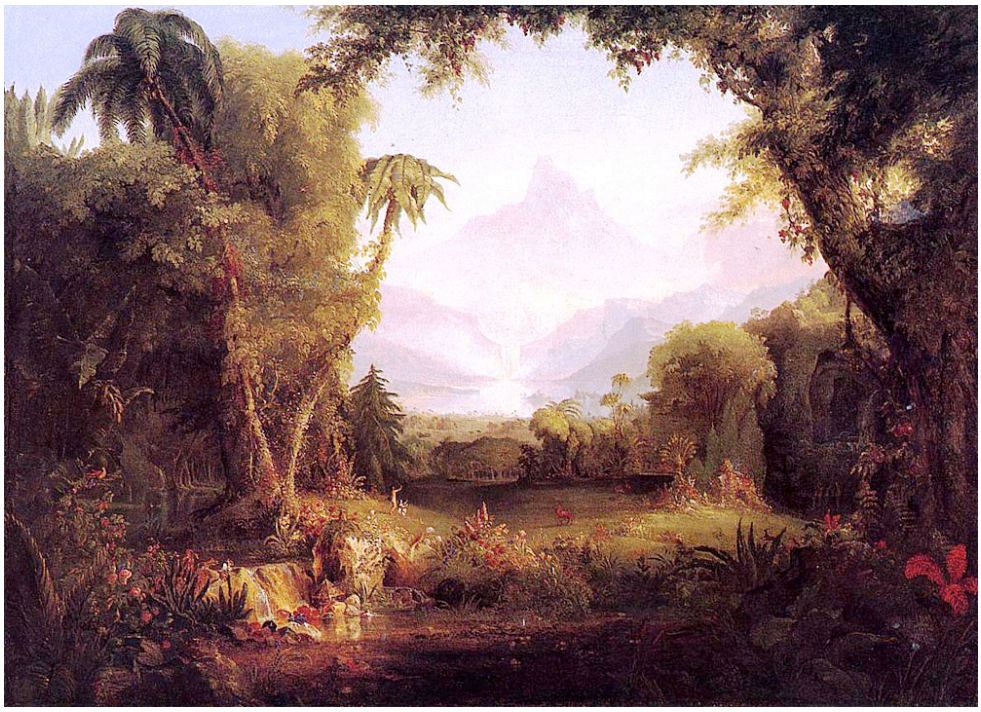

The Garden of Eden (above) and *The Expulsion from the Garden* (below) by Thomas Cole (1828)

"I am convinced that the supreme act of reason, because it embraces all ideas, is an aesthetic act; and that only in beauty *are* truth *and* goodness *akin.–The philosopher must possess as much aesthetic force as the poet…Monotheism of reason and of the heart, polytheism of imagination and art, that is what we need!"* -F.W.J. Schelling[1]

"[Philosophy has] to rescue the facts as they are from the facts as they appear…we view the sky at noon on a fine day. It is blue, flooded by the light of the sun. The direct fact of observation is the sun as the sole origin of light, and the bare heavens. Conceive the myth of Adam and Eve in the Garden on the first day of human life. They watch the sunset, the stars appear:–'And, Lo!, creation widened to man's view.' The excess of light discloses facts and also conceals them." -A. N. Whitehead[2]

Preface

The aim of this essay is to sketch the striking similarities running through the thought of Plato (423-348 BCE), Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854), and Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), especially as they relate to the power of poetic imagination. At first glance, Schelling and Whitehead would seem to be representatives of disparate schools of philosophy: the former is normally considered an idealist, the latter, a realist. But this would be a superficial reading that misses the underlying unity of their reformed Platonism. As will become clear, the stated desire of each is to think the sensory manifold as a single universe; to wed Space and Time in the Thought of Eternity; to ground reality and ideality in one mediating power. Like Plato, Schelling and Whitehead crowned philosophy the science of sciences and the art of arts, the creative core of all civilization. What finally distinguishes the philosopher from the sophist, according to Whitehead (summarizing Plato), is the philosopher's "resolute attempt to reconcile conflicting doctrines, each with its own solid ground of support."[3] But as will also become clear, both Schelling and Whitehead *reformed* Plato in

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[1] F.W.J. Schelling, "The Oldest Program toward a System in German Idealism," qtd. and tranl. by David Krell, *The Tragic Absolute: German Idealism and the Languishing of God* (Bloomignton: Indiana University Press, 2005), 24-25.

[2] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (New York: The Free Press, 1933), 155.

[3] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 120.

imaginative ways, adding other voices to his corpus of dialogues as a goad to their spiritual renewal.

To begin with, it is not at all obvious that Schelling's philosophy, taken as a whole, deserves the title of "idealism." Martin Heidegger, for example, suggests that Schelling "drives German idealism from within right past its own fundamental position."[4] More recently, Dalia Nassar,[5] Iain Hamilton Grant,[6] and Jason Wirth[7] have all contended that, despite his early allegiance to Johann Gottlieb Fichte's transcendental idealism, Schelling remains, in Wirth's words, "first and foremost a thinker of the question of Nature."[8]

As for Whitehead, Grant mentions him alongside Schelling as a promising example of speculative thinking "beyond the epistemological concerns of the philosophy of science,"[9] an issue to which I will return below.[10] George R. Lucas further cements this speculative affinity by reading Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as a historical precursor to Whitehead's philosophy of organism.[11] Though Whitehead never read much of the German idealists directly,[12] he was deeply influenced by the British idealists John

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[4] Martin Heidegger, trans. Joan Stambaugh, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 4.

[5] Dalia Nassar, "From a Philosophy of Self to a Philosophy of Nature: Goethe and the Development of Schelling's Naturphilosophie," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92:3 (2010), 304-321. Nassar suggests that Schelling broke with Fichte largely as a result of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's influence.

[6] Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2008). Grant complains that contemporary scholarship on Schelling's philosophy pays "scant attention…to the deep vein of naturephilosophy running through it" (3).

[7] Jason Wirth, "Schelling's Contemporary Resurgence," in *Philosophy Compass* 6/9 (2011), 585-598.

[8] Wirth, "Resurgence," 594n6.

[9] Grant, *After Schelling*, vii, ix.

[10] See p. 5.

[11] George R. Lucas, Jr., *The Rehabilitation of Whitehead: An Analytic and Historical Assessment of Process Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York, 1989), 25-26.

[12] Alfred North Whitehead, *Essays in Science and Philosophy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 116.

McTaggart and F. H. Bradley, going so far as to suggest that his own cosmology might be considered "a transformation of some main doctrines of Absolute Idealism onto a realistic basis."[13] Furthermore, Antoon Braeckman has indirectly linked Whitehead's philosophical scheme to Schelling's through the intermediary of the Schellingian philosopher-poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose role in the formation of William Wordsworth's aesthetic vision of nature is well known.[14] Though he was familiar with Coleridge,[15] the deepest impact on Whitehead came through the poetry of Wordsworth, which he study throughout his life. According to his daughter's testimony, he would read *The Prelude* almost daily "as if it were the Bible, pouring over the meaning of various passages."[16]

The philosophies of Schelling and Whitehead, then, seem to spiral around a common intuition, namely that the division between the real and the ideal can and should be overcome through an act of poetic imagination. Before further unpacking the commonalities of their imaginative schemes, I will briefly outline the role of imagination in *speculative* philosophy as over and against *critical* philosophy.

Cosmological and Transcendental Imagination

Speculative, or *cosmological* imagination has been clearly differentiated from critical, or *transcendental* imagination, by contemporary Whiteheadian philosopher Isabelle

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[13] Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), xiii.

[14] Antoon Braeckman, "Whitehead and German Idealism: A Poetic Heritage," in *Process Studies* 14:4 (1985), 265-286.

[15] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 79.

[16] Mary A Wyman, "Whitehead's Philosophy of Science in Light of Wordsworth's Poetry," in *Philosophy of Science* 23 (1956), 283.

Stengers.[17] For Stengers, there are two basic approaches open for the questioning postkantian philosopher. The first is to ask, "What do I know?"; the second, "What can I know?"[18] Answering the former question requires the spark of imaginative speculation, which leaps across the gap in the circuit of perception between mind and matter in an attempt to *see into* the sea of relationships within which one swims. The philosopher-seer risks propositions regarding the reality of nature's ideality, hedging her bets on the synechological[19] affinity of mind and nature. Given the *precursive trust*[20] of the speculative philosopher, these cosmological propositions are liable to infect common sense experience, allowing new worlds to take shape in the social imagination.

The latter question ("What *can* I know?) characterizes the critical approach. It separates the knower from its object, directing attention almost exclusively to one's own subjective reflection upon an external world. Questions of epistemology take center stage, questions of the *a priori* conditions of conscious experience that shape and make possible any perception or understanding of the phenomenal manifold corresponding to the external world. These are important questions to ask, but in the modern period, they have been over-emphasized, resulting in the solipsistic positivism of scientific materialism.[21] Because the positivist has lost all precursive trust, what the world is *in itself*, the realist's question, is dismissed as a grandiose search for God's view of the cosmos.

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[17] Isabelle Stengers, "Serializing Realism," a talk at the Fourth International Conference of the Whitehead Research Project, entitled "Metaphysics and Things: New Forms of Speculative Thought," at Claremont Graduate University on 12/2/2010.

[18] See also Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 224.

[19] See C.S. Peirce, ed. Justin Buchler, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (Mineda: Dover, 2011), 354. "Synechism is that tendency of philosophical thought which insists upon the idea of continuity as of prime importance in phillosophy."

[20] See William James, ed. by John J. McDermott, "Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Radical Empiricism," in *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977), 740.

[21] See Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 125-130

To further differentiate the cosmological from the transcendental imagination, it may be helpful to personify each mode by linking it with its foremost historical exemplar. Plato's philosophy, as interpreted by Schelling and Whitehead, is rooted in a *cosmological* conception of imagination, while the philosophy of Immanuel Kant is rooted in a *transcendental* conception of imagination.

Although, in *Republic*, Plato explicitly places "imagination" *(eikasia*) below the line dividing the soul's cognitive powers,[22] the straightforward translation of *eikasia* as "imagination" can be misleading in light of Schelling and Whitehead's use of the idea. *Eikasia* is etymologically related to *eikon*, usually translated as "icon" or "image" in the context of Greek culture, but can also be translated as "idol" in the Biblical context. *Eikasia* could then better be called the power of "imaging," of seeing images, in either of two modes: *as images* of things or *as things themselves*. Plato's placement of *eikasia* below the divided line is meant to be a critique of *idolatrous* imagination, that which has fallen into duality, mistaking opinions regarding appearances of "what comes to be and passes away, but never really is"[23] for the truth of what really is. Schelling would call this fallen mode of *eikasia* the merely reflective understanding, perceptually isolated from reality and so only able to relate to abstract concepts and finite sensory particulars.[24]

However, when the "imaging" soul is wise to Plato's teaching in *Sophist* concerning "non-being"–*that non-being is a kind of being–*[25] philosophical imagination can express itself through the poetic art of iconography, what neoplatonists like Proclus and

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[22] Ch. IV. *Eikasia* is below the divided line because it relates only to sensory appearances in the world of becoming, remaining ignorant of the ideal realm of eternal being.

[23] *Timaeus* 28a.

[24] F.W.J. Schelling, transl. Peter Heath, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 73.

[25] *Sophist* 241d.

Iamblichus will later call *theurgy*. Theurgy is a ritual technology capable of re-shaping the soul though the power of magical symbols.

Whitehead refers to Plato's teaching of the being of non-being as "at once an extreme instance of the breakdown of language, and the enunciation of a profound metaphysical truth."[26] The difficult phrase points to the way linguistic propositions generate meaning, not only through discontinuous antinomies, but through constructive contrasts: words are not things, but nevertheless, the symbolic assembly of a string of words can illuminate the relations between things in unforeseen ways. Plato is himself skilled in poetic ritual, as is evident in the many mythopoeic "likely stories" articulated in his dialogues. Each such story is an image meant to be transformative of the soul's erotic commerce with eternal Ideas. They function as initiatory rites revealing the inner nature of the divine imagination. In *Timaeus*, for example, Plato narrates the genesis of the universe as "a moving image of eternity," inviting the individual psyche to be reminded of its analogical participation in the ever-lasting life and motion of the world-soul.[27] The speculative imagination sees the moving image of the visible heavens and knows it to be the mirror of an invisible source.[28]

Plato's was also a *cosmomorphic* imagination, seeking to transform experience of the sensible world by actively bringing it into harmony with the intelligence of Ideas. Schelling identifies this speculative mode of imagination with reason rather than the understanding, since it participates freely in both the finite and the infinite, and indeed,

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[26] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 222.

[27] *Timaeus* 37c-e. See also the Hermetic analogy: "As above, so below."

[28] "Mirror," in Latin, is *speculum*.

discovers the infinite in the finite.[29] Speculative imagination is neither above nor below the divided line, but is the very power responsible for making the division in the first place. Imagination draws the line, being both productivity and product, activity and artifact.[30]

Even from Kant's transcendental perspective, imagination is the most indispensable of the soul's cognitive powers, mysteriously generating both sensibility and understanding.[31] But for him, imagination emerges from a depth unreachable by the light of conscious will. Ideas of imagination are therefore reduced to determinate concepts of the merely reflective (i.e., unproductive) understanding,[32] leading to "those insoluble contradictions which Kant set forth under the name of the antinomies."[33] These antinomies forbid the soul real knowledge concerning God, the cosmos, or even its own freedom, since in each case, critical reflection alone leads only to an aporia inherent to sense-bound understanding. The understanding, says Kant, "stretches its wings in vain, if it tries to soar beyond the world of sense by the mere power of speculation."[34]

Schelling understands this alienation of the critical soul from the world as a "necessary evil," a means to an end, since only through such a trial by separation can the soul

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[29] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 176.

[30] See Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 29, 145. "Geometry proceeds, in that it sets out, not from theorems, but from postulates…it demands that reflection itself bring forth [the line] in productive intuition, which it certainly would not do if the genesis of a line could be conveyed through concepts."

[31] See *Critique of Pure Reason*, in *The Essential Kant* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1970), 96.

[32] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (New York: Dover, 2005), 59, 142.

[33] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 176.

[34] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 287.

become conscious of its imaginative power.[35] Only if sense-bound conceptuality is treated as an end in itself does it become an "intellectual sickness."[36] The transcendental imagination, then, is not simply to be rejected as a false mode of mentality, but *passed through* as the first phase in the advance toward genuine philosophical knowledge.

In the next section, I will continue to explore the reformed Platonism of Schelling and Whitehead as it relates to the cosmological imagination, focusing more explicitly on the affinity of their respective philosophical schemes.

The Platonic Imagination in Schelling and Whitehead

It should already be clear that Schelling and Whitehead each owe a huge intellectual debt to Plato. Whitehead characterizes the European philosophical tradition as "a series of footnotes to Plato," and suggests that his own philosophy of organism is best understood as a contemporary rendering of Plato's general point of view.[37] Schelling studied Plato's dialogues in the original Greek during his teenage years at seminary in Tübingen, dedicating many notebooks to their elucidation in which he creatively translated Plato's words into his own. According to Bruce Matthews, these notebooks indicate "the determinative role this philosopher plays in the young Schelling's intellectual world."[38]

At other times, Schelling and Whitehead are also critical of Plato's tendency to overplay the separation of the transcendent ideal from the immanent reality. Schelling tentatively

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[35] F.W.J. Schelling, transl. Bruce Matthews, *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, transl. Bruce Matthews (New York: State University of New York, 2007), 17-18.

[36] Schelling, *Schellings Sämtliche Werke I/2*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart-Augsberg: J.G. Cotta, 1856-64), 14. Transl. by Bruce Matthews.

[37] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 39.

[38] Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York, 2011), 21.

agrees with Aristotle's reproach of Plato's merely logical formulation of the doctrine of participation,[39] as if the doctrine could explain the actual coming into being of living things.[40] Whitehead also admits that Plato tended to waver between the doctrine of participation by the persuasion of divine *Eros* and the doctrine of the imposition of "static, frozen, and lifeless" Ideas upon mute materiality according to the plan of an omnipotent divine Craftsman.[41]

Despite this wavering, Whitehead points to the genius of Plato's definitive statement that "anything that affects or is affected by another has real existence."[42] Plato here sides with the doctrine of participation of Ideas as dynamically entertained by an immanent world-soul, a real medium, "connecting the eternality of being with the fluency of becoming."[43] This mediating principle is "the way in which Plato conceived the many actualities of the physical world as components in each other's natures."[44] The medium is otherwise called the Receptacle, the "third kind" between universal Ideas and sensory particulars, the "wetnurse" providing a formless locus for Ideas to temporally incarnate.[45] As Whitehead describes it, the Receptacle is "the matrix for all begetting… [transforming] the manifoldness of the many into the unity of the one."[46]

This description suggests that Whitehead conceived of the ultimate notion of his own philosophy of organism, Creativity, as a result of dwelling upon Plato's difficult but

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[39] See *Parmenides*.

[40] Schelling, *Positive Philosophy*, 159-160.

[41] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 147-148.

[42] *Sophist*, 247. Quoted in Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 119.

[43] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 120.

[44] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 134.

[45] *Timaeus*, 49a.

[46] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 150.

important notion of the Receptacle. Creativity is "that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion, which is the universe conjunctively."[47]

The one feature distinguishing Creativity from the Receptacle is that "it is divested of the notion of passive receptivity."[48] This distinction is due to Whitehead's preference for the doctrine of Ideas as "lures of feeling," rather than as molds forcibly stamped upon neutral and emotionless matter. In the jargon of his philosophical scheme, incarnate actual occasions, not abstract eternal objects, are ultimately responsible for deciding on the subjective form of their own concrescence.[49]

"It is to be noted," says Whitehead,

> that every actual entity, including God, is something individual for its own sake; and thereby transcends the rest of actuality. And also it is to be noted that every actual entity, including God, is a creature transcended by the creativity which it qualifies.[50]

The *substance* of each actual occasion, and of each individualizing society of occasions (i.e., each organism), is a creative *power*, a harmonization of a diversity of inherited forces seeking satisfaction in a definite ideal future. "The definition of being," says Plato, "is simply power."[51] That *being* is essentially *power* implies that *to be* is to be *in between*.[52] To be is to become together, to *concresce*. Nothing in the universe is external

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[47] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

[48] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

[49] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

[50] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

[51] *Sophist*, 247e.

[52] See *Symposium* 202 on *metaxy* and *Eros*.

to anything else, since all occasions are internally related. Even the universal occasion, the world-soul or divine imagination, is not "a transcendent emanation," but "a component in common" with the living bodies of the actual world.[53]

Creativity, like the Receptacle, provides "a unity [for] the events of Nature…by reason of their community of locus."[54] But unlike Plato's Receptacle, which is essentially passive and formless, Whitehead's Creativity contains its own forces of formation.

Schelling re-imagines the participatory moments of Plato's dialogues for his own creative purposes, distilling them into what he calls Plato's organic *Urform*. Like imagination's mediation of the senses and the understanding, this *Urform* provides a "formula for thinking the productive relationship that holds between a unity and its parts."[55] The *Urform* is "not simply a form of our subjective understanding that we project onto the world, but…the productive structure of objective nature itself."[56] It could be likened to Goethe's *Urpflanze*, raised from the botanical to the spiritual dimension. It is "the secret band" linking the individual soul's imagination to the divine imagination of the world-soul.[57] Schelling points to Plato's articulation of the *Urform* in *Philebus* as "a gift of the Gods"[58] granting human creatures participation in the divine *intellectus archetypus*.[59] Schelling's translation of *Philebus* 16c-e is as follows:

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[53] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 130.

[54] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 187.

[55] Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy*, 22.

[56] Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy,* 131.

[57] Schelling, *Schellings Sämtliche Werke I/2*, 55.

[58] *Philebus* 16c.

[59] Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy,* 132.

> ...the ancients (greater men and closer to the gods than us) have left the story behind, that everything which has ever [existed] emerged out of unity and multiplicity, in that it united within itself the unlimited and the limit: that thus we too in light of this arrangement of things should presuppose and search [in] every object [for] one idea.[60]

Schelling's conception of the cosmos as the product of two dynamically polarized forces, one expansive and the other contractive, is the offspring of the Platonic *Urform.*[61] These cosmogenic forces, the keystone of his entire *Naturphilosophie*, are alternatively characterized by Schelling in terms of the polarity between *natura naturans* (nature as subject, as productivity) and *natura naturata* (nature as object, as product).[62] Whitehead marks an identical difference between "nature alive" and "nature lifeless."[63] The latter is nature viewed through a film of abstraction as mere extension lacking all quality and value. It is nature according to what Whitehead calls "presentational immediacy," a barren and solipsistic mode of sense-perception perfected by self-conscious human beings and mistaken by most philosophers for the most fundamental mode of perception. This mistake is Whitehead's famous "fallacy of misplaced concreteness."[64] "Presentational immediacy" is the product of imagination in service of the reified "object-concepts" of the understanding.[65] "Causal efficacy" is Whitehead's term for the more fundamental mode of perception through directly bodily

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[60] Quoted in Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy,* 23.

[61] Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy,* 132.

[62] F.W.J. Schelling, transl. Keith R Peterson, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (New York: State University of New York, 2004), 202.

[63] Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 127-169.

[64] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 51-55.

[65] See Wolfgang Smith, *Science and Myth: What We Are Never Told* (San Rafael: Sophia Perennis, 2010), 58.

inheritance of nature's emotional energies.[66] Here imagination is productive and impossible to mistake for its finished products. Schelling would similarly see "nature lifeless" as nature filtered through the merely ideal concepts of the reflective understanding, with its limited perception by way of superficial sensation. For Schelling, "[nothing] is actual in the absence of imagination," which is the power of productive intuition and absolute reason.[67] "Nature lifeless" is then entirely deficient in actuality, an empty idol.

"Nature alive" is nature viewed with imaginative sympathy as permeated with emotional intensities and aesthetic aims. As a participant in living nature, the percipient occasion no longer simply experiences the universe's beauty, but itself becomes an expression of this beauty. *Natura naturans* is nature before the Kantian epistemological bifurcation of its being into the mechanism of matter over and against the freedom of mind. At their generative core, each actual occasion, whether mineral, vegetable, animal, or human, "includes that which in cognitive experience takes the form of memory, anticipation, imagination, and thought."[68] Mentality, in other words, is not the unique possession of human beings, but participates in all actual occasions (or "actants" as Schelling calls them), to greater or lesser degree depending on the complexity of each occasion's form of individualized organization.[69]

In the next section of this essay, I will attempt to display the alchemical power of poetry in the process ontology of Schelling and Whitehead.

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[66] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 122.

[67] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 72.

[68] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 154.

[69] Schelling, *Philosophy of Nature*, 5-6, 39-40.

Towards a Poetic Form of Philosophy

Whitehead points to Percy Shelley and Wordsworth as the most emphatic witnesses of the Romantic reaction against the scientific materialism that divorced aesthetic values from nature. These values, "[arising] from…the brooding presence of the whole on to its various parts," were reduced by mechanistic natural philosophy to merely secondary qualities accidentally inhering in some more primary collection of material particles.[70] Shelley's and Wordsworth's reaction was to apotheosize imagination and its poetic expressions.[71]

According to Shelley, poetry is

> the center and circumference of knowledge, the root and blossom of all other systems of thought…that which, if blighted, denies the fruit and the seed, and withholds from the barren world the nourishment and the succession of the scions of the tree of life.[72]

Contemporary speculative philosopher and scholar of Romanticism, Timothy Morton, was recently asked where poetry begins.[73] In answering, he turned Shelley's metaphor upside down by suggesting that "rooting and blossoming are themselves a kind of poem." Poetry doesn't begin with human art, but in nature (*natura naturans*) itself. Human poetry is the flowering of earth. Said otherwise, imagination is an "elemental power," "not 'mine'…but…an alien 'force' *in me*."[74]

"What we speak of as nature," says Schelling, continuing the alchemical metaphor,

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[70] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 81-84.

[71] See Percy Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," and William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*.

[72] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry."

[73] "Interview with Timothy Morton" on 2/25/12, http://eeevee2.blogspot.com/2012/02/interview-with-timothy-morton.html (accessed 5/8/12).

[74] Susanna Lindberg, "On the Night of the Elemental Imaginary," in *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011), 157.

> is a poem lying pent in a mysterious script. Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking, flies from itself.[75]

The alchemical *Magnum Opus* involves precisely such a circulatory psychophysical movement between seeking and fleeing, fusing and separating, assimilation and differentiation, eventually culminating in the purified Philosopher's Stone, the *coincidentia oppositorum*.[76] The alchemist's soul becomes the a mirror of material processes, "always [manifesting] itself indirectly, as something other than itself."[77] Schelling's philosophical scheme, according to Matthews, is founded upon "*a decentered Self*" whose consciousness is rooted in the genetic history of the larger totality of geological strata.[78] This totality represents an "unprethinkable"[79] past of subterranean forces, whose structure, though it cannot be logically demonstrated, can be imaginatively (*re)generated*. Schelling's approach to philosophy is not demonstrative, but *generative*, in that it abandons traditional philosophical pretensions to deductive proof and formulaic certainty. "To philosophize about nature," says Schelling, "means to create nature," that is, to create *after the manner* of nature as subject (*natura naturans*).[80] Or as Grant puts it, when "I" think nature, "what thinks in me is what is outside me."[81]

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[75] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 232.

[76] See Patrick Harpur, *The Philosopher's Secret Fire: A History of the Imagination* (London: Penguin, 2002), 135-154.

[77] Harpur, *The Philosopher's Secret Fire*, 143.

[78] Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy*, 28.

[79] See F.W.J. Schelling, transl. Jason Wirth, *The Ages of the World: (fragment) from the Handwritten Remains: Third Version (c. 1815)* (New York: State University of New York, 2000), 12.

[80] Quoted in Grant, *After Schelling*, 1.

[81] Grant, *After Nature*, 158.

Whitehead also abandons the pursuit of the abstract demonstration of truth: "...philosophy, in any proper sense of the term, cannot be proved. For proof is based on abstraction."[82] The role of philosophy, instead, is "to find a conventional phraseology for the vivid suggestiveness of the poet," and thereby to "increase our penetration" even where "we can never fully understand."[83] Ultimately, "the aim of philosophy is sheer disclosure" and the production of "self-evidence."[84] Philosophy, for Whitehead, as for Schelling, begins and ends in a wonder at "the fact of creation and existence itself," a fact best expressed poetically.[85]

"There is the one all-embracing fact," says Whitehead, "which is the advancing history of the one Universe."[86] The one advancing Universe is simultaneously a *social* fact concerning the novel togetherness of the community of actual occasions. In Schelling's terms, "there is but one absolute work of art, which may indeed exist in altogether different versions, yet it is still only one, even though it should not yet exist in its most ultimate form."[87] It should not yet exist in its ultimate form because the universe as a whole is an ongoing creative process, a cosmopoiesis, rather than an already finished product. The Universe, itself a poem, "is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth."[88]

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[82] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 49.

[83] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 50-51.

[84] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 49.

[85] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 168 and *Positive Philosophy*, 73.

[86] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 150.

[87] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 231.

[88] Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry."

Schelling and Whitehead both forged their philosophical imaginations by reading the dialogues of Plato. Despite the "old quarrel between poetry and philosophy,"[89] Plato's infamous ban of Homeric poetry from his ideal republic was not based on a rejection of poetry as such, but on a distaste for lyric and epic poetry that depicted the Gods as immoral. Plato's true desire was simply to replace traditional poetry with his own novel form of theoretical poetry, consisting of hymns to the gods and eulogies to good people.[90] Shelley said of Plato the poet that "the truth and splendor of his imagery, and the melody of his language, are the most intense that it is possible to conceive."[91] The aim of Plato's poetry was to "kindle a harmony" in imagination by reminding the soul of the measured rhythms of reason asleep within in. "What is commonly called theoretical reason," says Schelling, "is nothing else but imagination in the service of freedom."[92] Plato recognized that poetry is an indispensable element in the formation of a free society's values. Similarly, Whitehead suggests that "both [philosophy and poetry] seek to express that ultimate good sense which we term civilization."[93]

In the context of his own age, Whitehead looked in particular to the nature poetry of the Romantics, which, like philosophy, functions primarily as a critic of specialized scientific abstractions on behalf of common sense and concrete experience:

> Remembering the poetic rendering of our concrete experience, we see at once that the element of value…of being an end in itself…must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. 'Value' is the word I

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[89] *Republic*, 607b.

[90] See Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 389-395.

[91] Shelly, "A Defense of Poetry."

[92] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 176.

[93] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 174.

> use for the intrinsic reality of an event. Value is an element which permeates through and through the poetic view of nature. We have only to transfer to the very texture of realization in itself that value which we recognize so readily in terms of human life. This is the secret of Wordsworth's worship of nature.[94]

From Schelling's perspective, poetry and philosophy are also akin, but they should not be simply identified. Like philosophers, poets and other creative artists may sometimes be "in possession of the idea of absolute truth and beauty," but unlike philosophers, they remain unconscious of this fact "precisely because they are possessed by it."[95] Schelling refers to poets and creative artists as mouthpieces of the Gods, but suggests they only display Ideas in particular external things, like poems and paintings, while philosophers "exhibit the archetypes of things in and for themselves…in an inward way."[96]

It would seem, then, that traditional poets, like the polytheistic myths they sung, were still largely embedded in an unconscious nature. Though this universe is undoubtedly vibrantly glimmering with the values of intrinsic reality, it has not yet become the conscious poetry of spirit. It has not yet attained *philosophy*, "the poetic gift…reiterated to its highest power."[97]

Conclusion

For Schelling, "a system is completed when it is lead back to its starting point."[98] If, as Plato suggests, philosophy begins in wonder, then, "at the end, when philosophic

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[94] Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 89.

[95] F.W.J. Schelling, *Bruno, or On the Natural and Divine Principle of Things* (New York: State University of New York, 1984), 132. See also Plato's *Apology* 22c-e.

[96] Schelling, *Bruno*, 132.

[97] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 230-231.

[98] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 232.

thought has done its best, the wonder remains."[99] Schelling called for a new philosophical mythology, a "likely story" capable of directing the aesthetic and moral aims of human civilization.[100] Whitehead, too, recognized the need for myth, since "there is no escape" from the inherited societal customs which form the given facts of human experience.[101] As Plato realized, human beings are capable of no more than *likely* stories, since we are "like" God, made in the divine image, and not Godself. This likeness still grants us a tremendous degree of imaginative freedom. Though "there is no such fact as absolute freedom," since as both Whitehead and Schelling argue, freedom presupposes necessity,[102] the self-consciousness of human beings nonetheless "rises to the peak of free imagination, in which the conceptual novelties search through a universe in which they are not datively exemplified."[103] Every grade of actual occasion is both "in time" and "out of time" by virtue of its physical and mental poles, but self-conscious human occasions participate more fully in God's primordial envisagement of the Eternal Ideas.[104] "The importance of [the human] as the supreme example of a living organism is beyond question," says Whitehead.[105] But even so, the goal of philosophy is not to further alienate humanity from its earthly garden, but to heal the human soul's self-inflicted wound. The redemption of the soul through the skilled application of the medicine of true poetry is the Romantic project for philosophy. By consciously enacting

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[99] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 168. See also Plato's *Theaeteus* 155d.

[100] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 232-233.

[101] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 63.

[102] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 133; Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 203-204.

[103] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 161.

[104] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 248.

[105] Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 24.

the magical power of poetry, the philosopher is, like the alchemical physician, able to "[operate] not only on his patients' bodies but on their imaginations."[106]

"Philosophy," says Schelling, "was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge," and upon rising to the heights of self-conscious spirit, will "flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which [it] took [its] source."[107] The only difference between the original and final forms of the philosophical imagination is that, after the long labour of its journey into alienation has ended, the final form carries with it the hard won knowledge of "The feeling of life endless, the great thought/By which we live, Infinity and God."[108] Along with its original innocence, the imagination has in the end what it did not possess in the beginning: self-knowledge and moral freedom. The evil of alienation–"of nature and history rent asunder"[109]–works as an *athanor*, or alchemical fire, upon the soul, transmuting the mercury of intellectuality into the gold of spiritual love,[110] a love, according to Wordsworth,

> Which acts, nor can exist/Without Imagination, which in truth,/Is but another name for absolute strength/And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,/And reason in her most exalted mood.[111]

In the imaginative philosophies of Schelling and Whitehead, Plato's speculative *Urform* of unity in multiplicity is rediscovered to again become the "eternal unchanging

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[106] Francis Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), 151.

[107] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 232.

[108] Wordsworth, *The Prelude* XIII, quoted in M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), 118.

[109] Schelling, *Transcendental Idealism*, 231.

[110] Valentin Tomberg, *Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism*, transl. by Robert Powell (New York: Penguin, 2002), 194.

[111] Wordsworth, *The Prelude* XIV, quoted in Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 118.

characteristic of every investigation."[112] This intuition of the unity of the real and the ideal, of the infinite in the finite, brought to fruition, not only redeems the human soul of its internal strife; the rekindled imagination becomes also the Redeemer[113] of the external[114] universe:

> For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God…in hope…that [it] will also be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God…the whole of creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.[115]

[112] *Philebus* 15d.

[113] See Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, 119-122.

[114] The redeemed universe is the universe understood according to Whitehead's doctrine of *internal* relations (see p. 10 above).

[115] *Romans* 8:19-22.

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