

# **The End of Christianity: The Tyranny of the Homogenous State and F.W.J. Schelling's Anticipation of a Post-Ecclesial Christianity**

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Virtually all the German Idealists, from Fichte to Feuerbach, envisioned a future in which the distinction between church and state would disappear and the truth of Christianity would be realized as the truth of man. The secularization of the Christian phenomenon is one of the basic themes of German Idealism. Secularization in this context does not mean the *emancipation* of Western societies from traditional religion (pace Hans Blumenberg): quite to the contrary, for Hegel and Schelling, secularization is the destiny or end of Christianity, even as it signals the demise of the theological and institutional means through which this tradition evolved. And yet Hegel and Schelling developed diametrically opposed versions of the secularization thesis. The conflict between them stems from an ambiguity in the word, "end" (German, *das Ende*): for with respect to Christianity, "end" can mean *telos* or final cause (*das Ziel des Christentums*), e.g., the flowering of the plant that actualizes the potentials implicit in its origins; or it can mean *eschaton* (*der Schluss des Christentums*), the decisive break in the flow of linear time and the history of revelation. According to this latter, Schellingian view, the concept of time which only came to consciousness with the appropriation of Biblical revelation (Koyré), will reach its end (*Schluss*) in a singularity that is nothing short of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God into the human order. Where Hegel's secularization thesis is *teleological*, Schelling's is *eschatological*. Christianity is not yet finished with us, according to Schelling, and the genuine fulfillment of its historical trajectory could only be a much more profound interiorization of the Gospel than the ersatz transcendence consumerism offers us. Simultaneously with this universally internalized *evangelion*, Schelling anticipates the appearance of a genuinely just and universally liberating social-political organization which fully exteriorizes the Christian truth. Taking a page from Joachim of Fiore, Schelling describes this as the advent of the Church of St. John (under the sign of the spirit), to succeed the Church of St. Peter (medieval, Catholic, and under the sign of the Father) and the Church of St. Paul (modern, Protestant, and under the sign of the Son). In this third and final age of revelation, the various churches will cease to exist as competing socio-political institutions because the world itself will be identical with the church. This utopian moment is still to come, Schelling argues—and perhaps it must always remain still to come, the irreducibly futural—and therefore the Christian must continue to struggle to resist the systemic injustice of the times and the inauthenticity of its spiritual life.

In my next book I wish to compare and contrast the theologico-political relevance of Hegel's and Schelling's alternative theories of secularization—to develop the strikingly similar yet essentially divergent accounts of the present moment which the two thinkers engender. For these two opposed political theologies lead to very different forms of political consciousness and action. While the Hegelian account has already been extensively developed in the last century by Marxists, post-Marxists, and neo-Liberals, the Schellingian account has never been constructed. This paper is a prolegomenon to the longer work.

Today I will examine how Hegel's theory of secularization has gained widespread acceptance in contemporary political theory in the face of the apparent conquest of so called liberal-capitalism over all other forms of social-political-economic organization. For thinkers such as Alexander Kojève and his American follower Frances Fukuyama, the superiority of liberal capitalism to, for example, fascism and communism, is an undeniable fact. Its triumph in recent years, its seeming unstoppable globalization, signals that what Hegel called the end of history has in fact happened in our time. I will examine how the Hegelian approach to secularization leads to a resignation and preservation of the status quo. As nothing less than the *telos* of human history, global liberal capitalism, once achieved, means that there is no longer

anything to await, nothing further to be revealed, no fundamental change in our contemporary system of meaning and value to be expected. In the book, I will explore in some detail how Schelling's theory of secularization can offer us resources for naming the contemporary moment otherwise, as the *tyranny* of the homogenous state, which precisely because it is tyrannical, cannot be the end of history. In the paper I will present today, I can only introduce this project, focusing on the German Idealist concept of secularization in general, the Hegelian thesis of the end of history and problems that arise from it, and in conclusion gesture to how a Schellingian theory of secularization could address these problems. I envision this as a work in political theology in Carl Schmitt's sense of the term: an exposition of the theological sources still active in modern social and political thought. But the point of this de-construction of the secular is not simply to entrench a modernist narrative of how secularism succeeds Christianity; rather I wish to show how, as the *ground* of the secular, the theological remains as a potential corrective of the naiveté of secularism and a living source for an immanent critique of its systemic self-deceptions. And while I will here subscribe to a thesis that has been characterized elsewhere as technological determinism (by thinkers such as Heidegger, Strauss, Grant), I am interested in revisiting the question of hope as a theological virtue foreign to both the political optimist (the left) and the political pessimist (the right). It is entirely consistent from a theological perspective, I will argue, to simultaneously assert the absence of any concrete possibilities for changing the exiting regime, that is--the current ruling tyranny (which I will call the consumer-capitalist juggernaut) cannot be corrected, reformed or overthrown by any existing political means--and the theological unacceptability of resignation. The Christian must resist injustice and work for a better world even as he knows that nothing short of the miraculous will save us from the self-destructive path of our current politics.

## Secularization

With the widespread dissemination of Frances Fukuyama's notion of "the end of history," Hegel's approach to secularization has never seemed more relevant. Building on Kojève's legendary reading of Hegel, Fukuyama describes our present situation as one in which liberal-capitalism has absorbed all traditional and religious forms of life and emerged triumphant over all other forms of government and economy. Because this signals the end of substantive ideological conflict, he characterizes the present moment in Hegelian terms as the end of history. As he wrote in the heady days of 1989, just before the fall of the Soviet Union and the apparent final defeat of Marxism:

The century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an "end of ideology" or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism. The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism. In the past decade, there have been unmistakable changes in the intellectual climate of the world's two largest communist countries, and the beginnings of significant reform movements in both. But this phenomenon extends beyond high politics and it can be seen also in the ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture in such diverse contexts as the peasants' markets and color television sets now omnipresent throughout China, the cooperative restaurants and clothing stores opened in the past year in Moscow, the Beethoven piped into Japanese department stores, and the rock music enjoyed alike in Prague, Rangoon, and Tehran. What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government (Fukuyama, 1989, 1).

Things have advanced even further in this direction today. Since 1989, the Soviet Union has collapsed, and with it, the legitimacy of Marxism as a viable system of political economy; China has transformed

into something that Fukuyama himself did not imagine, a thorough-going consumer society (even if still not a democratic one, and the fact that consumerism need not be allied with democracy ought to give us pause to think). At the same time other parts of the world, India, for example, have rapidly industrialized with the intent of becoming commercially if not culturally indistinguishable, at least for its privileged classes, from Western societies. Fukuyama draws on Hegel who confirms his view of the situation as irreversible and final. The end of history is also the end of man in a certain sense. For man, according to Hegel, is essentially a mode of restless spirit, tirelessly endeavoring to overcome the contradictions in himself and his world: with nothing left to strive for, he goes extinct. Since Fukuyama is usually heralded as a cheerleader of neo-Liberalism, it is worth dwelling on the downbeat note with which he ends his 1989 essay:

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual care taking of the museum of human history. I can feel in myself, and see in others around me, a powerful nostalgia for the time when history existed. Such nostalgia, in fact, will continue to fuel competition and conflict even in the post historical world for some time to come. Even though I recognize its inevitability, I have the most ambivalent feelings for the civilization that has been created in Europe since 1945, with its north Atlantic and Asian offshoots. Perhaps this very prospect of centuries of boredom at the end of history will serve to get history started once again (Fukuyama, 1989, 16).

The end of history is also the triumph of the secular over traditional church-bound forms of spiritual life. That we live in what Charles Taylor has described as "a secular age" seems more or less obvious. When one compares the role of the church in the Middle Ages or the early modern period to its marginal role in today's developed societies, it becomes difficult to deny that we Europeans and their descendants are post-ecclesial Christians. The social functions the churches once played have passed into the hands of secular institutions. We no longer need or want clerics or religious to educate us, guide our souls, or care for the weakest among us. The roles of educator, spiritual director, social worker and health care worker, were, until the last century played by priests, evangelical ministers and their wives, and the brothers and sisters of the great religious orders. This social support system, widespread throughout Europe and integral to the development of the new world, was a residue of medieval Christendom and allowed Christianity to continue to provide a theological container for human life from the cradle to the grave and beyond, until well into the modern era. Now these functions are fulfilled by purely secular professionals, trained in non-denomination universities and colleges and salaried by a combination of private and public funds.

The transference of duties from religious to secular institutions is not a mere re-distribution of resources. On the contrary, allied with the secularization of the social safety net is a rejection of the theological claim of Christianity by a growing majority of citizens of Western societies, even while general Christian values, such as compassion for the under-privileged, freedom of conscience, and the right to practice a religion of one's choosing, remain cherished humanistic idols. The notion of a creator God, a personal infinite who creates and lovingly preserves his creation, seems to be untenable in the light of the random nature of evolution, the dysteleological structure of matter and the facts of geological history. The notion of the God exclusively incarnate in the figure of Jesus, who died on the cross for the salvation of the world, strikes modern Westerners as both too fantastic to be believed and arrogantly unrealistic about the dignity and depth of non-Christian religious traditions. And the Roman Catholic church, the last remaining Christian denomination that can still legitimately aspire to be a world church, is for a majority of educated people in the developed world, a medieval relic, an institution of oppression, elevating a class of male clerics above the rest of humanity, denying the dignity of women and

encouraging negative attitudes toward the body which appear to be linked to environmental degradation (White, 1967). The undeniable fact of this societal transformation from ecclesial to secular society inspired some Christian theologians such as Tom Altizer to speak in the 1960s of the death of God as not merely an atheist trope derived from Hegel and Nietzsche but a theological reality (Altizer, 1966, 2002). Some prominent philosophers have argued for an interpretation of Christianity as essentially directed to atheist secularism (Vattimo, 2002, Gauchet, 1999).

Hegelians describe the secular world as the end of Christianity in the sense of *telos*: the fulfillment of what was always implicit in Christianity, namely a world where the distinction between the sacred and the profane is finally overcome, and where the transcendent God truly dies for us in the figure of the incarnate and crucified Christ. They follow Kojève in heralding the rise of the homogenous state after the disappearance of the churches and the demise of the nation state as the destiny of the West (Kojève, 1934). For Kojève, the homogenous state is the last stage in human history, when the stable achievement of the liberal ideal of equality brings the dialectic of spirit to an end because in a free society of equals, spirit no longer has anything to strive for. The key for Kojève is Hegel's notion of alienation (*Entfremdung*), which is in turn based on Hegel's immanentist theory of Trinity and creation: history progresses as spirit continually tries to find itself in its alienated other, or in Hegel's terms, struggles for recognition—the repetition of what the Father accomplishes through creation. The work of spirit (history) is thus produced by a continual splitting or alienating of spirit from itself and a reconciliation or re-discovery of spirit in its other. However, each stage of reconciliation produces new divisions that call for a new reconciliation. On a political level, this means that spirit cannot rest with any particular form of government or cultural life, but must continually sublate (*aufheben*) the contradictions that inevitably manifest themselves in various historical stages of social-political organization. The *telos* of spirit is the search for a realization of a concrete unity among the greatest possible diversity of individuals, a quest that generates universal history which has as its end the homogenous state in which all live together according to a shared morality that is the outcome of rational reflection. Spirit's need for mutual recognition and formal equality among all means that history cannot stop until full mutuality is achieved among all classes, or until the inequality of the master-slave structure is abolished. History culminates in the equal recognition of all individuals, a state in which the need for war no longer exists and a global order without class distinction, without masters or slaves, is achieved: a single society of free human beings who mutually recognize and affirm one another's freedom.

For Kojève, the revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries set the conditions for the fulfillment of history in the form a universal society, or the homogenous state. This free society will be capitalist not communist, according to Kojève, because capitalism alone can generate the wealth needed for universal human prosperity. A large part of my planned book will to some degree confirm Kojève by genealogically connecting the major concepts of secular society to Christian concepts, that is, to carry out a political theological deconstruction of the secular: not only sovereignty, which Schmitt traced back to the belief in divine transcendence, but liberty, equality, even instrumental reason must be traced back to Christian theology. These are floating theologoumena, disavowed theological concepts which persist in our consciousness in disguised forms.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, I will engage a variety of twentieth-century political philosophers who spoke on various fronts of the total assimilation of Christianity into modern

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<sup>1</sup> By the term, “floating theologoumenon,” I mean an unclear and derivative secular concept in need of hermeneutic elaboration. In theology, a theologoumenon is a non-binding theological position (by distinction from a revealed dogma). I use it here in the sense of a concept, expression of belief or value-judgment which is implicitly determined by theology, and can be shown to be the historical effect of theology. It is “floating” because its theological referent has been forgotten, disavowed or repressed, and relocated in a secular setting. The floating theologoumenon is opaque and groundless, enforced with feeling rather than argument, and subsisting as a philosophically obscure opinion. Examples of floating theologoumena include some of the most common concepts in public discourse, for example, “freedom,” “the dignity of the person,” “human rights,” “the sanctity of life,” “wholeness.” The word “secular” itself is a floating theologoumenon, one-side of a Latin binary whose other side is “eternal.” A floating theologoumenon is both *active*, a living symbol influencing contemporary thinking, and *derivative*, one that conceals its original sources.

liberal-capitalist culture, Christianity both as the end or final cause of a secular society, as did Kojève, and as the efficient cause of that culture as does Marcel Gauchet, and above all Max Weber.

Reversing Marxist material determinism, Weber famously connected the rise of capitalism to the endless industry of secular Protestantism (Weber, 1905). Capitalism, Weber reasoned, is the product of not merely economic forces but of a certain kind of religious consciousness. On a materially level capitalism depends on a level of production that constantly exceeds the satisfaction of basic needs. Invariably, it was the Protestant nations of Europe by distinction from the Catholic nations that made the greatest gains in the production and marketing of goods and the generation of capital because it was Protestantism alone that gave people a spiritual incentive to work and produce more than they need or even want. As Fukuyama puts it, Weber's argument is that "Protestants eat well while Catholics sleep well" (Fukuyama, 1989, 4). For Weber, economic theories that posited man as a rational profit-maximizer miss the psychology truly at work in capitalism. For example, on the profit-maximization thesis, one would assume that raising the piece-work wage in a given enterprise should increase labor productivity. But in fact, in many cases, Weber discovered, raising the piece-work wage actually had the opposite effect of decreasing productivity. Workers accustomed to earning a certain amount a day found they could earn the same amount by working less, and did so because they valued leisure more than income. The asceticism of the early capitalist, who on principle defers enjoyment of his wealth (saves and invests rather than spends) could not, according to Weber, be explained by material forces at work on society: rather they emerge from spiritual forces, from a state of consciousness or a collective psychology originating in Protestantism. Contrary to Marx, in Weber's view, the material modes of production are not the driving forces of history but the effect of religion and culture.

Weber defends this thesis in some detail in his 1905 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It was not only that the Reformation changed our view of work, dignifying the most mundane professions as blessed by God just as much as any "sacred" calling; crucial to the rise of capitalism is the self-denial and other-worldliness of the capitalist. For capitalism to function, a significant percentage of the population must be driven by internal motives to engage in ceaseless self-initiated work, developing their own enterprises and engaging in trade and the accumulation of capital for investment. In order for this to happen, Weber argues, the capitalist must possess a distinctive psychology: he cannot be satisfied with working to live but must live to work. Capitalist asceticism derives from the Protestant and especially Calvinist doctrine of pre-destination. The anxiety generated by the doctrine of pre-destination shifted the emphasis in Christian spirituality from trusting in the grace of God to supplement what is wanting in our moral life and forgiving us our sins (the medieval Catholic way), to daily dispelling the fear and despair that we are damned. The Protestant's duty was to hold fast in faith that one was chosen and dispel doubt since lack of faith was evidence of damnation. A self-confident this-worldly industriousness, which tirelessly contributes to the production of capital, but without indulging in the pleasures wealth made possible is the best sign one could hope for that one is saved.

Fukuyama application of Kojève's end of history thesis is a broadly Weberian claim: the political transformations in Western society in the past century have a spiritual rather than a purely material basis; they are driven by the religious and philosophical traditions of the West. In the wake of the cold war, the failure of Marxism, and the subsequent globalization of liberal capitalism, Kojève is triumphantly vindicated, according to Fukuyama. With no more battles to be fought and no more experiments in social engineering needed, the world has arrived at the homogenous state: the invincible combination of capitalism and liberal democracy, which consigns all other ideologies to the dust bin of history. What Fukuyama adds to Kojève's recipe is the leaven of consumerism, which now becomes the primary form by which recognition is mediated: the human being's desire to be valued by others is transferred to a materialist plane where valuation becomes the appropriation of the things others value. In our post-historical epoch, lifestyle and fashion are the primary mechanisms of mutual esteem. While man as the restless striver after transcendence may have gone extinct in the process, Fukuyama is confident that a modest degree of enjoyment, if not a thorough-going this-worldly happiness, hitherto unknown to much of the human race, can be distributed to all.

## New Forms of Tyranny

It is this last claim of Fukuyama's which will be the entry point for my Schellingian dismantling of the end of history thesis. The homogenous state, if it has in fact been achieved in our times, cannot be the end of history, even from a Hegelian perspective, for one simple reason: rather than universally distributing liberty and equality, it has produced new and insidious forms of tyranny. We must once and for all divest ourselves of the deception that consumer-capitalism is the globalization of 19th century liberalism. Classical liberalism was for the most part a form of Christian humanism. Consumer-capitalism has killed it as a philosophy. Equality and liberty are precisely what cannot survive the conjunction of consumerism and capitalism. Since there is nothing very liberal about the homogeneous state, I will speak of the rise of the consumer-capitalist juggernaut. A juggernaut is a huge, human-powered wagon which carried an image of a Hindu God through crowded Indian streets. The devotees were encouraged to throw themselves beneath its wheels in an act of hysterical self-sacrifice. A juggernaut refers, then, to an unstoppable force of destruction, something that demands blind devotion and sacrifice. To say that the consumer-capitalist society is a juggernaut means: no one can stop its progress. It is not driven by a central intelligence but moves inexorably by force of a collective mania. It consumes and transforms all diverse natural and human environments into the mono-culture which it requires for the unhampered flow of capital. It will only stop when there is nothing left to destroy. The juggernaut is always outside the political equation—it is not bound by any social contract. The cherished liberty of the individual is qualified by the commandment that all you hold to be most true and valuable must be relegated to a private, politically innocuous space. Moreover, far from the social equality fantasized by Kojève and Fukuyama, capitalism has resuscitated that oldest of human institutions: slavery (Belloc, 1912). For it is clear, if not on purely economic than on ecological grounds, that not all can partake in the carnival of consumption: there must be a slave labor force hidden away somewhere in some site of unspeakable injustice, making our inexpensive clothes and devices for rock bottom wages.

It will require a great deal more time and space than I have today to elaborate the nature of the new forms of tyranny introduced by the homogeneous state. I will briefly name and describe the three predominant forms: tyranny over desire, tyranny over knowing, and tyranny over communal living. Consumer-capitalism is a tyranny over desire, dictating from within the very psyche of the consumer, which is the endless target of media driven manipulation, what he is to hope and fear. It is a tyranny over knowing, for its principle means of enforcement is science-technology, a machine culture which harnesses science to serve it, a science which functions as an inscrutable and a-political authority on all ultimate questions. Finally consumer-capitalism is a tyranny over communal living, banishing all local forms of social and political organization and replacing them with a market friendly alternative. While the state can tolerate a limitless diversity of *private* ethical and religious convictions, these beliefs must not show themselves in public. The state has zero tolerance for local forms of communal living but demands in every instance that they become part of the global exchange, which inevitably entails replacing local social and political values with the international system of production and consumption.

A brief word then, on the three forms of tyranny by which the juggernaut dominates and displaces man.

*The tyranny over desire.* Consumerism is the absurd belief in the individual's endless freedom to upgrade his identity through the purchase of mass-produced products and thereby achieve "recognition" and perhaps, if the ad makers are to be trusted, beatitude—a belief for which we are willing to sacrifice our lives and the life of our planet, and which we know on some level is false. The freedom of the consumer is endless because it is purely negative: it consists in an unlimited capacity to choose on an ontologically limited plane: we are free to choose, not our forms of political organization or the economic structures of our societies, but from an endless variety of material goods. The ethos of the age, the ethos of consumption is not optional. As Slavoj Žižek has put it, the denizens of late capitalism labor under a super-ego injunction to enjoy at all cost (Žižek, 1999). They must enjoy their distracted and endlessly unsatisfying lives; they must lose themselves in the work of constant upgrading. The absence of real decision is crucial to the logic of consumerism, which demands of the consumer an infinite effort to find

satisfaction in that which he somehow knows can never satisfy. The recognition achieved through fashion and self-adornment is as unsatisfying as the pleasures derived from purchasing new products. To quote David Fincher's *Fight Club*, "We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like." The hysteria of consumption is a situation of maximal unhappiness, for we are like the gerbil on the wheel which can never get anywhere no matter how fast it runs, and at the same time, and by virtue of that unhappiness, a situation of maximal profit.

*The tyranny over knowing.* Science-Technology (what George Grant refers to as "technique") is more than merely the motor that makes the consumer-capitalist juggernaut move; it is also the expression of an ideology that has colonized the epistemic-ontological life of man just as thoroughly as consumerism has colonized his volitional life. Consumerism directs and restricts the range of our desires, scientism directs and restricts the sphere of ontological questioning. From any number of texts announcing the triumph of science over metaphysics, let us consider Wilfred Sellars' seminal 1962 piece, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (Sellars, 1962). By distinguishing between the "manifest image" and the "scientific image" of the world, Sellars in effect decommissions all forms of philosophical ontology. The manifest image includes subjective intentions, thoughts, and appearances, the world as it appears to a first-person perspective; the scientific image describes the world in terms of the theoretical physical sciences, the world precisely as it does not appear to a first-person but the structure of which we indirectly indicate through notions such as causality, particles and forces. The manifest image includes practical or moral claims, whereas the scientific image does not. While Sellars appears to be endeavoring to carve out a space for philosophy as a discourse about norms in a situation in which the all-important task of ontology has now been taken over by the sciences, in his own words, "to formulate a scientifically oriented, naturalistic realism which would 'save the appearances,'" the historical effect of his article was the opposite: far from empowering philosophy Sellars emasculated it. The game is already up when Sellars's proclaims, "In the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not" (Sellars, 1962, 173). A small priesthood of scientists, speaking a language incomprehensible to most of us, and free of the public sphere with its messy discourse of norms and values, now delivers us, like Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor, of the burden of knowing.

*The tyranny over communal living.* While it is endlessly permissive in the private sphere, where the individual is free to believe anything he likes, the homogenous state has little tolerance in the public sphere and grants its citizens little range for real political and ethical diversity. All local forms of organization, self-governance and economic exchange along with all traditions before the age of progress must be either de-politicized or abolished. Fukuyama adds that the catalyst in the achievement of the homogenous state is technology. And with modern technology comes a military threat that places irresistible pressure on the country that is out of pace with its neighbors to technologize itself. Technologization requires a market economy, in Fukuyama's words, "a uniform horizon of economic production possibilities." Such a market cannot tolerate cultural and ethnic diversity. "All countries undergoing economic modernization must increasingly resemble one another: they must unify nationally on the basis of a centralized state, urbanize, replace traditional forms of social organization like tribe, sect, and family with economically rational ones based on function and efficiency, and provide for the universal education of their citizens" (Fukuyama, 1992, xv). The punishment for not modernizing is isolation, cultural and economic death, and loss of sovereignty: without a link to global markets and consumer culture, the recalcitrant anti-modern state will have no chance of producing the capital required to develop a technological system of defense.

If the homogenous state is a tyranny, then even from a Hegelian perspective it is not the end of history. There is still a great deal to resist, on the one hand, the interior colonization of human desire and intellect, and on the other, the exterior colonization of the natural inclination of human communities to structure and govern themselves. But theology has an even more emphatic critique to make. Has secularism not in fact twisted Christianity into its opposite? Persons, the substantial relations of Trinitarian theology (Zizioulas, 2002, chapter one), become atomistic centers of competing desire, with no essential connection to one another; the common good becomes quantifiable economic efficiency and

utility, GDP; the desire for life with God becomes the need for constant new distraction or horizontal transcendence. On the other hand, is this not what the Hegelian dialectic in fact does, turn a thing into the opposite of itself and retain that inversion (the negative) as the innermost truth of the thing? But such a dark Hegelianism (which is Žižek's view) leads only to cynicism. The Hegelian perspective offers us no solutions: it remains bound by Hegel's teleological view and must always consider the political as the inevitable effect of an historical dialectic. Hegelianism divests the moment of its moral urgency. Schelling, the greatest critic of Hegel in the nineteenth century, sees nothing inevitable about history and consequently calls on Christianity to decide in favor of the Gospel and to resist and overthrow everything that falls short of the awaited *eschaton*.

## The Schellingian Alternative

The late Schelling's philosophy of revelation inspires us to ask a different set of questions of the secular age. Schellingian Christianity urges us forward into a future that will be different from the present. The current state of the world is no doubt a product of Christianity, but not all historical products are things that ought to be. Consumer capitalism, from a Schellingian perspective, is a Christian monster, a deformation of the revelation, and a mockery of the age of spirit which is still to come.

There is little space here for a summary of Schelling's three volume positive philosophy, which he labored on for twenty-five years, until his death in 1854. A complete exposition of this little understood chapter in the history of German Idealism is no doubt necessary for a full development of a Schellingian theory of secularization. As a prolegomenon to this work and a conclusion to this essay, I will introduce the late Schelling's notion of philosophical religion, which he foresees as the heir of ecclesial Christianity. I wish for the moment to simply indicate the Schellingian conception of a different way of being secular.

Schelling predicts a future Christianity in which revelation will become the inner truth of reason without being reduced to a product of reason. Where for Hegel, religion is cancelled and preserved as philosophy at the end of history (*aufgehoben*), for Schelling philosophical religion is the final epoch of revelation, the third age of the church, the Age of the Spirit (after the Ages of the Father and the Son--Schelling is a follower of Joachim of Fiore in this respect). Schelling's dialectic of Christianity and world appears to be quite close to Hegel's but with a crucial difference: Schelling denies the logic of the *Aufhebung* and insists on the principle of non-contradiction. He creates a philosophy of history that moves not by cancelling and preserving (*aufheben*) previous stages but by positing them as past and producing (*erzeugen*) in their wake something entirely new (Beach, 1994, 113). Thus when Schelling speaks of a secular age succeeding Protestantism as Protestantism succeeded Catholicism, he is not speaking of a 'sublation' (*Aufhebung*) of Protestantism by secularism or a sublation of Catholicism by Protestantism. In a Hegelian sublation, the sublated form is fully negated, proven to be lacking in truth, one-sided, and unsustainable. It literally turns into its successor, or rather, turns outward and reveals its successor as its inner truth. Thus nothing of Catholicism survives as Catholicism in the Protestant age: whatever was true about Catholicism is now revealed to be part of Protestantism. For Schelling, by contrast, the historical form remains what it was but as something that is now irretrievably past. Its successor brings something entirely new to the scene, something that was not even implicit in the previous form. The difference from Hegel can be put in the following terms: where for Hegel history does not produce the new but rather simply unfolds or makes explicit what was always already there, Schellingian history is history in the strong, and I would argue, originally Christian sense of the word: things do not remain what they were or teleologically unfold out of their origins but are entirely transformed by time.

Philosophical religion will make all historical forms of the church and the state obsolete. For both the church and the state only exist insofar as man is not whole. The church and the state are products of the fall of man, which Schelling understands as a loss of wholeness, a loss of man's original unity with the divine. Because man has lost God and with that his freedom, he must be externally coerced into a situation that will restore to some degree the exercise of his freedom: this external rational ordering of

society is the state.<sup>2</sup> In the medieval and modern periods, the inner life of fallen man is protected and nurtured through the state's twin institution, the church. While the functions of church and state were confused in medieval Catholicism, it was the task of the Reformation to separate them, so that the different purposes they serve could be made clear. Modernity discovered that the church and the state are distinct from one another as man's soul is distinct from his body. But future Christianity will see the realization of a perfect accord between soul and body, inner and outer life. In the third age of the church, neither external authorities nor private feelings will dominate consciousness; rather the outer and the inner side of Christianity will become finally appropriate to each other. Such an age does not need a church or a state in any conventional sense; such an age is one in which society itself becomes church.

Schelling regards the church as the community made possible by the historically continuous presence of Christ in the world. Christianity inexorably aims at a unification of the church with the world. Historically it has been the task of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of St. Peter, to prevent accommodationism (subordination of revealed truth to merely human norms of reason) by exercising political power over culture and science and forcibly maintaining an external unity of belief. It has been the task of the Protestant churches, the Church of Paul or the Pauline Church, to free the conscience of the Christian from external constraint and prevent authoritarianism through the separation of church and state. The Petrine Church unified the external Christian community through political control of culture. The Pauline Church emancipated culture from ecclesiastical censure by interiorizing the revelation. The Catholic Church achieved unity at the cost of interiority—the merely external unity of medieval Christendom was, Schelling argues, at the cost of the neglected inner life of Christianity, in which a chaos of private religion ran rampant. The Protestant churches achieved interiority at the cost of unity, demolishing the external authority of the church and empowering the individual's direct experience of God, but with mostly negative results: externally, the endless fragmentation of Christendom into minor churches, and internally the subjectivization of Christianity. Without the Reformation, modernity would not have occurred. Free from Rome, the West gives birth to the Enlightenment and the sciences flourish. And in Schelling's view, only free science is authentically Christian. Paradoxically the emancipation of philosophy and science from theology was necessary if they were to develop as authentically Christian discourses.

The self-understanding of secular modernity, however, is a false consciousness: it believes itself to thrive *outside* of Christianity, to be self-sufficient, spontaneous, and independent of revelation. Schelling's point is that this is an illusion: the Enlightenment and Romanticism, modern philosophy and science, are through and through Christian, only they fail to recognize it. The third age of the church will occur when culture and science are at once autonomous and entirely Christian. Schelling thus envisions as the end of Christianity the exhaustive assimilation of all human enterprise into the Gospel, or alternatively, the exhaustive assimilation of the Gospel into all human enterprise. The end (*eskhaton*) of the Christian revelation is the overcoming of the church as an institution, existing either on the margin of the human community, as in the First Century, or intertwined with the political and social, as in medieval Catholicism, or in confrontation with the world, as in radical Protestantism; the church must become identical with the human community. This means that nothing authentically human can remain outside the church: all cultural and scientific activity must find a place within it (Schelling, 1831/32, 673).

Nothing is cancelled and preserved, rather all is changed. Thus philosophical religion is not an accommodation of Christian theology to the standards of an unbelieving world. Christianity is not to be watered down into a general spiritual outlook without historical content. Nor does Schelling envision an authoritarian imposition of religion upon culture which destroys the legitimate autonomy of the sciences. Schelling calls for a new form of Christianity and a new form of science and culture, which would be united as inner to outer, soul to body. Humanity will be whole once again, made one through a common interior experience that is fully exteriorized in social and cultural life. Schelling just as much as Hegel foresees the demise of denominations and nations, the disappearance of individual churches and competing nation states, in short, globalization, as the destiny of Christianity. But this globalized

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<sup>2</sup> See Danz, 2013.

Christianity will remain no less an era of revelation: “Having no external authority, this church will exist because everyone will come to it by his own volition and belong to it through his own conviction, for in it each spirit will have found a home . . . Christianity then will no longer be the old, narrow, stunted, puny Christianity of the prevailing dogmatic schools, and still less a Christianity thinly confined to miserable formulas which shun the light, nor will it be whittled down to an exclusively personal kind of Christianity. Instead it will be a truly public religion—not as a state church or as a high church, but as the religion of all mankind in which mankind will, at the same time, find the supreme knowledge (Hayes, 1995, 334).” The third age of the church will not be a homogenous state but a unity of diverse cultural forms, made possible by the common interior experience of Christ. The Church of St. John achieves unity without the sacrifice of diversity (Lawrence, 1989, 196). It is not the universalization of a particular form but the liberation of the church from every form. And because it is so liberated, future Christianity (philosophical religion) will be compatible with an incalculable diversity of outer forms.

All of the late Schelling’s philosophy can be placed under a single banner, a concept he introduces in his philosophy of mythology and which he elaborates logically, ontologically and theologically: the notion of “the ecstasy of reason.” The late Schelling reverses idealism by declaring that reason, although possessing a rich interior world of a priori notions, which idealism (or “negative philosophy”) has constructed into a variety of systems, is only fully reasonable when it is outside itself, ex-static, receiving a truth that transcends it. Like the second person of the Trinity, who is only truly himself to the degree that he empties himself, renounces the possibility of being solely *for himself*, renounces his own claim to divinity over and against the divinity of the Father, so is reason in the late Schelling only truly itself when it empties itself, renounces its own interior world as sufficient to itself and takes on the form of its opposite, that is, one that possesses nothing but depends entirely on an outside. Just as it is crucial to a proper understanding of the Christological hymn in the second chapter of Paul’s Letter to the Philippians to recognize that Christ has indeed a claim to equality with God, that Christ could have set himself up as God in the place of the Father, but “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself by taking on the form a slave” (Phil 2:7), that is, just as it is crucial to understand Christ as renouncing a real possibility for self-divinization and freely assuming the form of the anti-divine—not the demonic but the creaturely--so is it crucial for Schelling’s transcendental empiricism or realism to recognize that absolute idealism (Hegel) is not simply a mistake, but a genuinely plausible reversal of the truth.

But the emptying is for the sake of a return; the crucified Christ is risen and vindicated as truly divine. In the age of philosophical religion, what was received as alien and other than reason (revelation) will become reason’s very own. Reason will take over as its own ground a truth which did not originate in it, a truth that is initially foreign to it, but which becomes so intimate to it as to function as a virtual apriori. Christianity is not reason’s product—here the difference with Hegel is acute—nevertheless reason will so assimilate revelation as to become spontaneously Christian in all that it does. In a certain way, future Christianity is a Christianity without theology, insofar as every science will become the content of theology, or a religion without religion, insofar as everything will be religious, or a world without church insofar as world will be identical to church. Only in this way will the special knowledge of revelation become the general knowledge of all men (Schelling, 1831/32, 674). The institutions, divisions, class distinctions and barriers necessary to fallen man will once and for all be removed because Christ will be finally “all in all” (Colossians 3:11).

## Conclusion

What is the political point of Schelling’s messianic ecclesiology? Schelling offers us a way of understanding the contemporary era otherwise than as the end of history, when cultural homogeneity make political revolution irrelevant. On the one hand, we are given resources for acknowledging the *historical* necessity of the globalization of consumer-capitalism. As the monstrous offspring of the Biblical revelation, the consumer-capitalist juggernaut must expand until it dominates the planet. On the other hand, there is nothing genuinely Christian about it, and the forms of tyranny which it produces and

by which it rules must be exposed as such. In short, Schelling gives us reason to *hope* that Christianity has not played its last card with the rise of global consumer-capitalism and a social-political-ecclesiological transformation is still to come. Resistance, however futile it might be on a pragmatic level, is nonetheless a theological imperative. A Schellingian resistance to the juggernaut will not take the form of a systematic political movement. It will rather be a contingent politics, a politics that starts from where one is and uses what resources one has, without falling into the naïve optimism of the left and fantasizing that the advent of a just society is simply a matter of the concerted effort of a critical mass of people of good will. But neither will Schellingian Christianity fall into the resignation of the right and consider the status quo unalterable because it is the best we can do under the circumstances. Only a miracle will save us. But miracles have happened before.

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