

Deus Sive Vernunft

Schelling's Transformation of Spinoza's God

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C5.P1 On 6 January 1795, the twenty-year-old Schelling—still a student at the Tübinger Stift—wrote to his friend and former roommate, Hegel: “Now I am working on an *Ethics à la Spinoza*. It is designed to establish the highest principles of all philosophy, in which theoretical and practical reason are united”.^{1,2} A month later, he announced in another letter to Hegel: “I have become a Spinozist! Don't be astonished. You will soon hear how”.³ At this period in his philosophical development, Schelling had been deeply under the spell of Fichte's new philosophy and the *Wissenschaftslehre*. The text Schelling was writing at the time was the early *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*, though his characterization of this text⁴ would much better fit the somewhat later work which is the focus of the current paper: Schelling's 1801 *Darstellung meines System der Philosophie* (hereafter: *Presentation*). The *Presentation* is a text written *more geometrico*, following the style of Spinoza's *Ethics*. While Spinoza's influence and inspiration is stated explicitly and unmistakably in Schelling's preface,⁵ the content of this composition might seem quite foreign to Spinoza's philosophy, so much so, in fact, that Michael Vater—the astute translator and editor of the recent English translation of the text—has contended that “despite the formal similarities between Spinoza's geometrical method and Schelling's numbered mathematical-geometrical constructions, Schelling's direct debts to Spinoza are few”.⁶ The *Presentation* is an extremely dense and

¹ I am indebted to G. Anthony Bruno, Michael Della Rocca, Daniel Dragicevic, Alexander Englert, Eckart F örster, Zach Gartenberg, Anton Kabeshkin, John Morrison, Dalia Nassar, Jos é Maria Sanchez, and Birgit Sandkaulen-Bock for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

² Schelling AA 3/1: 17. English translation quoted from F örster 2012: 226n19.

³ Schelling AA 3/1: 22. Quoted from F örster 2012: 226. Cf. Nassar 2013: 171 and Sandkaulen-Bock 1990: 30–6.

⁴ As Beiser (2002: 472) notes, in the preface to *Vom Ich* Schelling explicitly states that his intention in this essay is to *destroy* the foundations of Spinoza's system.

⁵ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 145.

⁶ Vater 2012: 158.

difficult text,⁷ and while I agree that at first glance Schelling's engagement with the concept of reason (*Vernunft*) and the identity formula 'A=A' seems to have little if anything to do with Spinoza (especially since Spinoza's key terminology of 'God', '*causa sui*', 'substance', 'attribute', and 'mode' is barely mentioned in the *Presentation*), I suspect that at a deeper level Schelling is attempting to transform Spinoza's system by replacing *God*, Spinoza's ultimate reality, with *reason*.⁸ Though this might at first seem bizarre, I believe it can be profitably motivated and explained upon further reflection. It is this transformation of Spinoza's God into (the early) Schelling's reason that is the primary subject of this study.

C5.P2 I develop this paper in the following order. In the first part I provide a very brief overview of Schelling's lifelong engagement with Spinoza's philosophy, which will prepare us for my study of the 1801 *Presentation*. In the second part, I consider the formal structure and rhetoric of the *Presentation* against the background of Spinoza's *Ethics*, and show how Schelling regularly imitates Spinoza's tiniest rhetorical gestures. In the third and final part I turn to the opening of the *Presentation*, and argue that Schelling attempts there to distance himself from Fichte by developing a conception of reason as the absolute, or the identity of the subject and object, just as the thinking substance and the extended substance are identified in Spinoza's God.

C5.P3 Apart from contributing to the clarification of an important (and difficult) work in the development of German Idealism,⁹ my aim here is to recover a foundational transformation of Spinoza's philosophy the elucidation of which may shed light not only on Schelling's text, but also on a crucial aspect of Spinoza's system. This study will focus on the beginning of the *Presentation* essay, since a detailed explication of the entire work and its philosophy of nature and physics is beyond its scope.

C5.S1 1. Schelling's Life Companion

C5.P4 Schelling's *Presentation* is the first text of his so-called "Identity Philosophy" period.¹⁰ We have already seen that Schelling's conversion to Spinozism took

⁷ Fichte, whose own works are not glaring models of lucidity, complains about the obscurity of Schelling's *Presentation*. Thus, in a note on §2 of the *Presentation*, Fichte writes: "The nonsense of the second § has to be understood and clarified" (Fichte and Schelling 2012: 120). For a helpful discussion of Fichte's misreading of Schelling's *Presentation*, see Vater 2012: 168, 174.

⁸ Attempts at transforming Spinoza's philosophy were not rare in the classical period of German philosophy. An obvious example in this context is Herder's *Gott: Einige Gespräche* (1787).

⁹ For an illuminating discussion of the importance of Schelling's *Presentation* for the history of German Idealism, see Beiser 2002: 553–4. See also Sandkaulen-Bock 2005.

¹⁰ For two helpful discussions of Schelling's *Identitätssystem* period, see Zeltner 1975, Beiser 2002: chs. 6–8.

place early on. Spinoza's influence is salient in the *Naturphilosophie* period of 1795–1800. Thus, in his 1799 *First Outline of a System of a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling writes:

- C5.P5 Philosophy of nature, as the opposite of transcendental philosophy, is distinguished from the latter by the fact that it posits nature as the self-existent; therefore, it can most concisely be designated the *Spinozism of physics*.¹¹
- C5.P6 Schelling's attachment to Spinoza's philosophy continued well into his late period. In one of the drafts of the unfinished *Ages of the World (Weltalter)*, Schelling even characterizes the entire project of German Idealism as an attempt to come to terms with, and improve, Spinoza's philosophy:
- C5.P7 When German Idealism emerged in its highest intensification with Fichte, the fundamental thought of the I, that is, of a living unity of that which has being and Being [*einer lebendigen Einheit von Seiendem und Sein*], aroused the hope of an elevated Spinozism that led to what is vital.¹²
- C5.P8 Schelling presented Spinoza as his teacher and precursor also in the latter period of the *Weltalter* (1810s and early 1820s). Thus, in a section titled "General Discussion of the Doctrine of Pantheism Developed Here", Schelling writes: "Far be it from us to deny in Spinoza that for which he was our teacher and predecessor".¹³ At this point, we might expect Schelling to point out, as in his earlier writings, that the identity of Spinoza's thinking and extended substances anticipated Schelling's own identity, or indifference, of Subject and Object.¹⁴ Instead, Schelling turns to his most recent engagement with the primordial and concealed: "Perhaps, of all the modern philosophers, there was in Spinoza a dark feeling of that primordial time [*ein dunkles Gefühl jener Urzeit*] of which we have attempted to conceptualize so precisely".¹⁵ It is not entirely clear to me what this "dark feeling" which Schelling finds in Spinoza is; still it is quite remarkable that even with this turn toward the later phases of his philosophy, Schelling continues to consider himself to be following the steps of Spinoza.

¹¹ Schelling 2004: 194 |AS 1: 341. Let me note in passing that Spinoza never really developed a philosophy of physics. In one of his very late letters (dated 17 July 1676), he writes about this issue: "But perhaps I will pursue these matters more clearly with you some other time, if life lasts. For up until now I have not been able to set out anything concerning them in an orderly fashion" (Ep. 83 |IV/334/26–9. Italics added).

¹² Schelling 2000: 106 |SW I/8: 342.

¹³ Schelling 2000: 106 |SW I/8: 339.

¹⁴ See, for example, Schelling, *Presentation*, §1 (in Fichte and Schelling 2012), and 1994: 67. For the identity of the thinking and extended substance in Spinoza, see E2p7s.

¹⁵ Schelling 2000: 104 |SW I/8: 339–40.

C5.P9 Schelling's lectures on the history of modern philosophy from the 1830s include a detailed and extensive discussion of Spinoza. He begins by suggesting that Spinoza's decisive break with Cartesianism occurred "when Spinoza made what was First *in itself* [*das an sich*] into the sole point of departure, but also took no more of this into consideration than could be known with certainty, namely, necessary existence".¹⁶ There is a clear sense of admiration for Spinoza's boldness in Schelling's discussion, but the view of Spinoza as sticking to a minimalist conception of the absolute as mere necessary existence points also to Schelling's critique and departure from Spinoza. Like Hegel, Schelling criticizes Spinoza for cleansing the absolute of any subjective elements.¹⁷ Spinoza's God, says Schelling, is a rigid, infinite substance, devoid of life, movement, will, and even understanding.¹⁸

C5.P10 The Spinozist concept, as the history of philosophy shows, has been until the present time the point around which everything moves, or rather the imprisonment of thought [*die Gefangenschaft des Denkens*], from which thought has sought to emancipate itself by the succeeding systems without yet being able to do so. It is the concept by virtue of which there is in God *explicite*—expressly [*ausdrücklich*—neither will nor understanding [*Verstand*], according to which He really is only that which blindly exists [*nur der blind Existierende ist*—we can also say: that which exists in a subjectless way [*der subjectlos existierende*].¹⁹

C5.P11 I believe it would not be a far-fetched speculation to suggest that Schelling's depiction of Spinozism as "the imprisonment of thought" from which all the succeeding philosophical systems attempted to emancipate themselves refers also, and perhaps primarily, to the earlier stages of Schelling's own thought.²⁰ Interestingly, in spite of his lifelong and repeated attempts to amend Spinoza's system, it seems that in his lectures from the 1830s Schelling still thinks there is one simple remedy for all the ills of Spinoza's system: granting genuine freedom to both God and man. At this point in time, Schelling seems to be unimpressed by the freedom of self-determination Spinoza actually ascribes

¹⁶ Schelling 2000: 64 | AS 4: 449.

¹⁷ See Hegel 1995: III 286–7.

¹⁸ Ironically, Fichte pressed the very same charges against Schelling's understanding of reason as the absolute at the beginning of Schelling's *Presentation* (see Fichte and Schelling 2012: 122–3).

¹⁹ Schelling 1994: 65 | AS 4: 450. For Spinoza, will and intellect do not belong indeed to *natura naturans* (E1p31). It is not clear to me what Schelling means when he refers to *natura naturans* as "God *explicite*".

²⁰ Cf. White 1983: "One way in which the major epochs in Schelling's development can be distinguished is through the identification of what he sees, at a given time, as Spinoza's most serious flaw" (6).

to God (see E1d7 and E1p17c2).²¹ From this retrospective point of view in the 1830s, he writes:

- C5.P12 It is unquestionably the peacefulness and calm of the Spinozist system which particularly produced the idea of its depth, and which, with hidden but irresistible charm, has attracted so many minds.²²
- C5.P13 This tone of a disappointed and somewhat embittered lover might make the reader conclude that the affair is over. But then Schelling continues (keep in mind that our lover is by now in his early sixties):
- C5.P14 The Spinozist system will always remain in a certain sense a *model* [*Muster*]. A system of freedom—but with as great contours, with the same simplicity, as a perfect counter-image [*Gegenbild*] of the Spinozist system—*this would really be the highest system*. This is why Spinozism, despite the many attacks on it, and the many supposed refutations, has never really become something truly past, never been really overcome up to now.²³
- C5.P15 With this pledge of eternal and unrelenting love despite abundant disappointments, we leave our middle-aged lover, and return to the twenty-six-year-old Schelling, about to present his own system in a treatise written *more geometrico*.

C5.S2 **2. A System “*more geometrico*”**

- C5.P16 In his preface to the 1801 *Presentation* essay, Schelling scolds and warns his critics: “I shall no longer pay the least attention to any critical judgment that does not engage me over first principles, here expressed for the first time, and

²¹ Unless otherwise marked, all references to the *Ethics*, the early works of Spinoza, and his correspondence are to Curley’s translation Spinoza 1985/2016). I have relied on Gebhardt’s critical edition (Spinoza 1925, cited by volume, page, and line number and preceded by ‘G’) for the Latin and Dutch text of Spinoza. I use the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza’s works: TIE—*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*], DPP—*Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy* [*Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*], CM—*Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*], KV—*Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelfs Welstand*], TTP—*Theological-Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*], TP—*Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Politicus*], Ep—*Letters*. Passages in the *Ethics* will be referred to by means of the following abbreviations: a(-xiom), c(-orollary), p(-roposition), s(-cholium), and app(-endix); ‘d’ stands for either ‘definition’ (when it appears immediately to the right of the part of the book), or ‘demonstration’ (in all other cases). Hence, E1d3 is the third definition of part 1 and E1p16d is the demonstration of proposition 16 of part 1.

²² Schelling 1994: 66 |AS 4: 451.

²³ Schelling 1994: 66 |AS 4: 451–2. Italics added.

that fails either to attack these or deny what necessarily follows from particular statements derived from them”.²⁴ After suggesting that the reader suspend the evaluation of the work until “the end of the whole presentation”, Schelling turns to explain the work’s unique form:

- C5.P17 Concerning the manner of exposition, I have taken Spinoza as a model here, since I thought there was good reason to choose as a paradigm *the philosopher whom I believe came nearest my system in terms of content or material and in form*. I also adopted this model because this form of exposition allowed the greatest brevity of presentation and the most accurate assessment of the certainty of demonstration.²⁵
- C5.P18 Throughout the preface Schelling complains time and again that his writings have been deeply misunderstood, especially with regard to his debt to Fichte. Schelling notes that he is not alone in facing a readership that is unable to digest a nuanced and delicate philosophical systemization:
- C5.P19 [U]ntil now realism in its most sublime and perfect form (in Spinozism, I mean) has been thoroughly misconstrued and misunderstood in all the slanted opinions of it that have become public knowledge.²⁶
- C5.P20 Like Schelling, Spinoza has been deeply misunderstood, but this long period of misunderstanding Spinoza’s “realist” system is about to come to its end through Schelling’s *Presentation* essay.²⁷ Schelling praises the “most sublime and perfect form” of Spinoza’s system, and therefore, in this part of the paper we will concentrate on the *form* of the *Presentation* essay.
- C5.P21 While writing the *Presentation*, Schelling had Goethe’s copy of the *Ethics* on his desk.²⁸ The geometrical mechanisms of Schelling’s *Presentation* and Spinoza’s *Ethics* are similar, though not identical. Like the *Ethics*, the *Presentation* contains definitions (*Erklärungen*), propositions, corollaries (*Zusätze*), and demonstrations, though, in the *Presentation*, neither propositions nor demonstrations are designated as such with a title. Another common feature of both the *Ethics* and the *Presentation* is that in both texts the demonstrations designate explicitly the previous definitions and propositions upon which they rely. The Remarks (*Anmerkungen*) of the *Presentation* seem to be the

²⁴ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 144–5 |AA I/10: 115.

²⁵ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 145 |AA I/10: 115. Italics added.

²⁶ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 143 |AA I/10: 111.

²⁷ Notice the “until now” phrase in the passage above.

²⁸ See Förster 2012: 247 and Vater 2012: 156.

equivalent of the Scholia of the *Ethics*. The influence of the *Ethics* is felt not only in the structure or geometrical form of the *Presentation*, but even in its style, down to the tiny rhetorical gestures he adopts from Spinoza. Thus, we find Schelling frequently employing Spinoza's typical "insofar/*insofern*/*quatenus*" qualifier.²⁹ Consider, for example, the opening line of the essay:

C5.P22 §1. Definition. I call *reason* absolute reason, or reason insofar as it is conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and objective [*Erklärung. Ich nenne Vernunft die absolute Vernunft, oder die Vernunft, insofern sie als totale Indifferenz des Subjectiven und Objectiven gedacht wird*].³⁰

C5.P23 A discerning reader would of course object to the circularity of this definition. Yet, the circularity here seems to be intended and consciously employed. In fact, using this very feature of Schelling's definition of *Vernunft*, we can point out the *exact* text of Spinoza which serves as its model. This is the crucial definition of eternity at the beginning of Part One of the *Ethics*:

C5.P24 E1d8: By *eternity* I understand existence itself, insofar as it is conceived to follow necessarily from the definition alone of the eternal thing [*Per aeternitatem intelligo ipsam existentiam, quatenus ex sola rei aeternae definitione necessario sequi concipitur*].

C5.P25 Both definitions define a term (*aeternitas* and *Vernunft*) with a *definiens* that employs the *definiendum*.³¹ Both definitions contain a "*quatenus/insofern*" clause, and in both the *definiens* refers to how a thing is *conceived*.

C5.P26 Similar imitations of Spinoza's style can be found in the proposition of §2: "Outside reason is nothing, and in it everything". The proposition is followed by a demonstration (though Schelling does not explicitly designate it as such), which ends with a reassertion of the proposition that had been proved ("Therefore, nothing is outside reason, and everything is in it"), a practice Spinoza himself adopts from Euclid's *Elements*, and applies very frequently in the *Ethics* (see, for example, the demonstration of E1p6 ("One substance cannot be produced by another substance"), which concludes: "Therefore, one substance cannot be the cause of the other, or cannot be produced by the other, q.e.d.").³²

²⁹ Frank (2014: 135–6) notes the frequency of '*insofern*' in Schelling's philosophy of identity writings, though he does not consider the Spinozist background for the use of this qualifier.

³⁰ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 145 |AA I/10: 116.

³¹ For an explanation of Spinoza's, intended, circular definition of eternity, see Melamed 2012: 90–5.

³² Cf. E1p8d, E1p14d, E1p15d and E1p17d. Commenting on §7 of Schelling's demonstration, Vater 2012 claims: "Demonstration was not in play in previous theorems, however; they were

Schelling employs the practice of concluding the discussion of a proposition by a “therefore”, followed by the original proposition quite frequently in the beginning of the *Presentation*.³³ In a variation on this practice, §15 of the *Presentation* is followed by a demonstration that ends with “Therefore, etc.”, designating with this abbreviation the repetition of the original proposition to be proved. This abbreviation practice is also employed regularly in the *Ethics* and in Euclid’s *Elements*,³⁴ though there is no doubt that Schelling’s model of imitation is Spinoza’s *Ethics*, rather than the *Elements*, since the latter work is not mentioned at all in the *Presentation* essay.³⁵

C5.P27 Let me point out briefly two more examples of Schelling’s imitation of the rhetoric of the *Ethics*. Consider, first, his explanation of the proposition of §2 (“Outside reason is nothing, and in it everything”). Schelling writes:

C5.P28 The proposition as formulated would need of no proof or even explanation but would instead rank as an axiom, if so many people were not entirely unaware that there could be nothing at all outside reason.³⁶

C5.P29 Now, compare this explanation with Spinoza’s remark in E1p8s2 which addresses E1p7 (“It pertains to the nature of a substance to exist”):

C5.P30 But if men would attend to the nature of substance, they would have no doubt at all of the truth of E1p7. *Indeed, this proposition would be an axiom for everyone, and would be numbered among the common notions.*
(G II/50/2–5. Italics added).

C5.P31 In both texts a certain claim is presented as requiring no proof since it should be considered a universally agreed axiom, if not for the reckless thinking of most people. Both texts also assert the self-sufficiency of the ultimately real being (substance, in Spinoza’s case, reason in Schelling’s).³⁷

C5.P32 The second example is a rather dense claim of Schelling for which he refuses to provide any argumentation, and instead asserts that it is “self-evident”:

dependent on reflection or so-called intellectual intuition” (163. Cf. 159). While Vater is right in pointing out that Schelling does not *explicitly* designate any textual unit with the title “demonstration”, Schelling’s practice of repeating the claim that has been demonstrated at the end of the proof clearly indicates that he considered these textual units as demonstrations.

³³ See, for example, §§2, 3, 7, 10, and 11.

³⁴ See, for example, E3p5d, E3p19d, and E3p52d. Schelling employs this abbreviation practice in §§7 and 11 as well.

³⁵ Euclid’s *Elements* is hardly ever mentioned in Schelling’s other works as well.

³⁶ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 146 [AA I/10: 117. Italics added.

³⁷ I am indebted to John Morrison for the last point.

- C5.P33 §21. Absolute identity cannot cognize itself infinitely without infinitely positing itself as subject and object. This proposition is self-evident.³⁸
- C5.P34 Now compare the above proposition with Spinoza's E3p4:
- C5.P35 E3p4: No thing can be destroyed except through an external cause.
- C5.P36 Dem.: *This Proposition is evident through itself.* For the definition of any thing affirms, and does not deny, the thing's essence, or it posits the thing's essence, and does not take it away. So while we attend only to the thing itself, and not to external causes, we shall not be able to find anything in it which can destroy it, q.e.d. (Italics added).
- C5.P37 What Spinoza means by claiming that E3p4 is self-evident, and why he presents this claim as a mere proposition rather than an axiom (if it is indeed self-evident), are important questions in Spinoza scholarship.³⁹ Notice, however, that after asserting the self-evident nature of E3p4 Spinoza still attempts to motivate and justify the proposition. Schelling, in contrast, seems to think that his self-evident proposition is so transparent that it requires neither explanation nor proof. Just like E3p4, Schelling's §21 makes a strong *modal* claim. Usually, we expect philosophers to provide more robust argumentation the stronger the claim they make. Here, both philosophers seem at first reluctant to provide an argument. Spinoza eventually adds an explanation (and quite a helpful one). Schelling, in contrast, appears to be satisfied with the mere announcement of "self-evidence".
- C5.P38 There are numerous other passages in the *Presentation* where Schelling seems to be speaking in Spinoza's voice.⁴⁰ In a sense, the rhetorical imitation of a past philosopher is even more significant than a mere adoption of a past philosopher's views. Let us think for a moment what Schelling was trying to achieve by adopting Spinoza's philosophical rhetoric. Unlike the reception and adoption of some views of a past philosopher, the imitation of their rhetoric is primarily an act of *identification*. Whether Schelling considered himself a Second Spinoza or just wished to give this impression to his readers I will leave for the reader to judge.⁴¹

³⁸ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 151 |AA I/10: 123.

³⁹ For a helpful discussion of E3p4 and the immediately ensuing propositions, see Garrett 2002.

⁴⁰ On some occasions, Schelling adopts the argumentative structure of one of the more elaborate demonstrations in the *Ethics*, and employs a structurally similar argument in one of his own proofs. Compare, for example, the demonstration of §10 of the *Presentation* with E1p12d.

⁴¹ In the *Theological Political Treatise* (and the *Cogitata Metaphysica*), Spinoza himself exhibits a similar pattern when he adopts from Maimonides' *Guide* the practice of beginning a discussion with the imperative: "Know that". I hope to discuss this issue on another occasion.

- C5.P39 Let us turn now to the differences between the two geometrical expositions. The two most salient features in this regard are (1) the absence of axioms in the *Presentation*, and (2) the section enumeration in the *Presentation*, which, unlike the *Ethics*, includes both definitions and propositions in the same enumerated list (the *Ethics* enumerates definitions, axioms, and propositions separately). It is also noteworthy that in the *Presentation* the definitions are not concentrated at the opening of the book, but are rather spread throughout. The *Ethics* has a few definitions introduced in the middle of the various parts of the book,⁴² but the vast majority of its definitions appear at the beginning of each part.
- C5.P40 Schelling was clearly aware of these differences between his geometrical style and Spinoza's, and it seems that he was intentionally experimenting with this method. Schelling's unification of the lists of definitions and propositions could be an attempt to outdo Spinoza's monism by breaking the distinctions between the various kinds of assertions which together constitute the system. Schelling died in 1854. Were he to have lived a few more years and witnessed the discovery of the two Dutch manuscripts of Spinoza's early *Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being*, he would have learned that his hero, too, had engaged in similar experimentation.⁴³ The first appendix to Spinoza's *Short Treatise* is a three-page text written *more geometrico*, with axioms, propositions, demonstrations, and corollaries, but *with no definitions* (the demonstrations of the propositions in this appendix do not rely on any definitions, and hence it is clear that this work did not include a definitions section).⁴⁴ Like all things, even the idea of writing philosophy *more geometrico* does not appear *ex nihilo*, and some experimentation with this method of exposition seems to be quite useful, if not strictly necessary, for its success. Indeed, if we look carefully at the evolution of Spinoza's *Ethics* over the two decades or so during which it was written, we can detect very significant changes in both form and content.⁴⁵
- C5.P41 Following this brief discussion of the form of the *Presentation*, we turn now to an examination of its content.

⁴² Thus, in E5p25d, Spinoza refers to his definition of the third kind of cognition in E2p40s2. Cf. Spinoza's definitions of will, appetite, and desire in E3p9s, of bondage in E4pref (II/205), and of the state and citizenship in E4p37s2 (II/238/16).

⁴³ See Sigwart 1866.

⁴⁴ For a detailed discussion of the first appendix to the *Short Treatise*, see Melamed (unpublished manuscript).

⁴⁵ See Melamed 2015.

C5.S3

3. *Deus sive Vernunft*

C5.P42 The similarities between the forms of the two works—Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Schelling’s *Presentation*—are quite salient. Yet, recall that in his preface to the *Presentation*, Schelling claimed that the *Ethics* “came nearest my system in terms of content or material and in form”.⁴⁶ What were the similarities in *content* that Schelling had in mind here? At first sight, the two texts seem to have little in common content-wise. We have already encountered Michael Vater’s claim that content-wise the *Presentation*’s debt to Spinoza is quite minimal.⁴⁷ While I do not wish to deny the significant differences between the contents of the two works, I do think that upon closer examination, at least the beginning of the *Presentation* has much more in common with the *Ethics* than what first meets the eye. Let us begin with the first three sections of the *Presentation*, which I will quote here without their demonstrations or explanations, for the sake of concision.

C5.P43 §1. Definition. I call *reason* absolute reason, or reason insofar as it conceived as the total indifference of the subjective and objective.

C5.P44 §2. Outside reason is nothing, and in it everything.

C5.P45 §3. Reason is simply one and simply self-identical.⁴⁸

C5.P46 *Vernunft* is the notion with which Schelling opens the *Presentation*. At the opening of the *Ethics*, *ratio* plays no role.⁴⁹ Yet, if I am not mistaken, what Schelling is up to with these three definition-cum-propositions is an attempt to *recast or transform* Spinoza’s ultimate entity (or the absolute), i.e., God, into his own understanding of the absolute as *reason*.

C5.P47 Schelling is fully aware of the oddity of his definition of reason in §1. Thus, immediately following the definition, he notes:

C5.P48 A brief indication must be given of how one comes to understand reason this way. One gets there by reflecting on what presents itself in philosophy [as occupying a position] between the subjective and the objective, which evidently must be an item standing indifferently over against both extremes.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 145 |AA I/10: 115. ⁴⁷ Vater 2012: 158.

⁴⁸ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 145–7 |AA I/10: 116–18.

⁴⁹ On the role of *intellectus* in E1d4, see the discussion of the attributes in Melamed (forthcoming).

⁵⁰ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 145–6 |AA I/10: 116. On the anti-Fichtean element in this passage, see Förster 2014: 38–9.

- C5.P49 If we take a thought and abstract from it both the thinking subject and the thought object, what is left—claims Schelling—is the very *position* which unifies subject and object. Schelling names *this position* ‘reason.’⁵¹ He then adds:
- C5.P50 Reason, therefore, becomes the true *in-itself* [*dem wahren An sich*] through this abstraction, which is located precisely in the indifference-point of the subjective and the objective.⁵²
- C5.P51 Spinoza’s God is the logical locus where the thinking substance and extended substance are “one and the same thing [*una, eademque est res*]” (E2p7s).⁵³ Similarly, Schelling’s *Vernunft* is the “indifference point” of the object and subject. Schelling’s characterization of reason as “the true in-itself” also fits Spinoza’s view of God as the only thing that is truly “*in se*”.
- C5.P52 Spinoza’s presence becomes even more salient in the last paragraph of §1 in which Schelling discusses reason’s standpoint as opposed to time and succession:
- C5.P53 The standpoint of philosophy is the standpoint of reason, its kind of knowing is a knowing of things as they are in themselves, i.e., as they are in reason. *It is the nature of philosophy to completely suspend all succession and externality, all difference in time, and everything which mere imagination mingles with thought, in a word, to see in things only that aspect by which they express absolute reason, not insofar as they are objects of reflection, which is the subject to the laws of mechanism and has duration in time.*⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Fichte and Schelling 2012: “To conceive reason as absolute, and thus to come to the standpoint I require, one must abstract from what does the thinking. For the one who performs this abstraction reason immediately ceases to be something subjective, as most people imagine it; it can of course no longer be conceived as something objective either, since an objective something or a thought item becomes possible only in contrast to a thinking something, from which there is a complete abstraction here” (146 |AA I/10: 116).

⁵² Fichte and Schelling 2012 146 |AA I/10: 116–17. For an illuminating discussion of this passage, see Förster 2012: 248.

⁵³ Schelling might have in mind here a very specific and famous passage in E2p7s: “Some of the Hebrews seem to have seen this, as if through a cloud, when they maintained that God, God’s intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same”. Spinoza’s reference in this passage is to Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* (Part I, Ch. 68), where Maimonides claims that in God, the thinking subject, the thought, and the object thought are one and the same. This view was quite common among medieval philosophers. This doctrine almost invites a Schellingian reading, since it takes divine thought as the locus of the identity of the thinking subject and the thought object. Thus, calling the divine thought (i.e., the locus of the identity of the thinking subject and the thought object) “reason” makes perfect sense.

⁵⁴ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 146 |AA I/10: 117. For a helpful discussion of Schelling’s clear distinction between reason and reflection, see Frank 1985: 123–4 and Vater 2000: 218–19.

- CS.P54 The view of things only through “that aspect which expresses absolute reason” is reminiscent of Spinoza’s notion of viewing things “*sub specie aeternitatis*”, but if we still have any hesitation about the Spinozist background of the above passage, consider the italicized sentence in the passage above in comparison with E2p44c2:
- CS.P55 It is of the nature of Reason to perceive things under a certain species of eternity.
- CS.P56 Dem.: It is of the nature of Reason to regard things as necessary and not as contingent (by P44). And it perceives this necessity of things truly (by P41), i.e. (by IA6), as it is in itself. But (by IP16) this necessity of things is the very necessity of God’s eternal nature. Therefore, it is of the nature of Reason to regard things under this species of eternity.
- CS.P57 Both E2p44c2d and the final paragraph of §1 of the *Presentation* stress that reason conceives things “as they are in themselves”, and both passages stress that reason regards things as eternal and not in time.⁵⁵ Most noticeable, however, is Schelling’s formulation of his claim (“It is of the nature of philosophy. . .”) which is virtually a quotation of E2p44c2. Finally, we should notice Schelling’s adherence to Spinoza’s view of the imagination as the source of error and inadequate cognitions.⁵⁶ If we see things only through that aspect by which they express absolute reason, we should not allow *any mingling of the imagination*.
- CS.P58 Let us turn now to the next section of the *Presentation*. Schelling’s §2—“Outside reason is nothing, and in it everything”—is a variation on a claim which appears frequently in Spinoza’s writings.⁵⁷ Consider E1p15 and the following excerpt from E1p17d:
- CS.P59 E1p15: Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God [*Quicquid est, in Deo est, et nihil sine Deo esse, neque concipi potest*].
- CS.P60 E1p17d: [A]ll things are in God. So there can be nothing outside him [*omnia in Deo esse; quare nihil extra ipsum esse potest*].

⁵⁵ Spinoza explicitly rejects any understanding of eternity as infinite duration (see E1d8e and E5p23s). For a detailed discussion of Spinoza’s understanding of eternity, see Melamed 2012. Schelling himself quotes E5p23s at length in *Vom Ich* (AA I/2, 131r–132r). Cf. Nassar 2013: 179–80.

⁵⁶ See E2p41. Cf. Della Rocca 1996: 44–67 and 107–17.

⁵⁷ This point has already been noted by Vater 2012: 162.

- C5.P61 Similar formulations also appear in E2p33d, in Spinoza's 1663 *Cogitata Metaphysica*,⁵⁸ and in the *Short Treatise* (which was not available to Schelling and his contemporaries).⁵⁹ That this formula has been clearly associated by Schelling's contemporaries with Spinoza's philosophy we can also learn from a passage in a letter from Hölderlin to Hegel, dated 26 January 1795:
- C5.P62 [Fichte's] absolute I (=Spinoza's substance) contains all reality; *it is everything and outside it there is nothing*.⁶⁰
- C5.P63 Like Hölderlin, Schelling recasts the Spinozist formula—"outside God there is nothing"—by replacing God with the being which he considers to constitute the absolute: 'the I' in (Hölderlin's description of) Fichte's philosophy, and 'reason' in Schelling's case.⁶¹
- C5.P64 In the remark to §2 Schelling explicitly identifies reason as the absolute, thereby, making clear that reason substitutes for the traditional role of God:
- C5.P65 There is no philosophy except from the standpoint of the absolute. Throughout this presentation, no hesitation on this matter will be entertained: reason *is* the absolute to the extent that it is thought [*die Vernunft ist das Absolute, sobald sie gedacht wird*], just as we defined it (§1).⁶²
- C5.P66 While this transformation of Spinoza's God into *Vernunft* may well make some sense for the Spinozist (as we shall shortly see), the next phase of the absolute—identity, or rather absolute identity—is likely to strike her as an unmotivated move. In §3 Schelling tells the reader that reason is "one and self-identical", but this seems far too weak a claim to motivate the transition to identity since reason may well have other essential qualities (other than self-identity). If I am not mistaken, the true ground of the transition from reason to absolute identity lies in Schelling's initial characterization of reason in the explanation following the definition of reason in §1. There, as we have seen, Schelling presents reason as *the locus of the identity* of the subjective and objective.⁶³ Schelling's reason, we said, is just thought abstracted from the thinking subject, and the thought object. "Reason", claims Schelling, "becomes

⁵⁸ Spinoza: "There is nothing outside God" (CM I 10 |I/269/2).

⁵⁹ Spinoza: "[O]utside God, there is nothing" (KV I 2 |I/26/18).

⁶⁰ Hölderlin 2009: 48. For a helpful discussion of this passage, see Waibel 2014: 409–11.

⁶¹ The early Schelling followed Fichte in identifying Spinoza's substance with the absolute Not-I.

⁶² Fichte and Schelling 2012: 146 |AA I/10: 117.

⁶³ Cf. Beiser 2002: 554.

the true *in-itself* through this abstraction, which is located precisely in the indifference point of the subjective and objective”. This indifference—of subject and object lies at the very essence of reason, for Schelling. “It alone” he claims in §7 “expresses the essence of reason”, and it seems to be this crucial point that motivates the transition from reason to absolute identity.

C5.P67 When Schelling next turns to unfold and qualify absolute identity, he almost immediately turns to his old Spinozist vocabulary kit, proving that the “being” of absolute identity is an eternal truth (§8 Cor. 2),⁶⁴ that absolute identity is infinite (§10),⁶⁵ that “it belongs to the essence of absolute identity to be” (§11),⁶⁶ that “everything that is, is absolute identity itself” (§12),⁶⁷ that absolute identity is the only thing that “is in-itself”,⁶⁸ and that absolute identity is unique (§28)⁶⁹ and indivisible (§34 Cor. 1).⁷⁰ This is obviously the very cluster of qualities that characterizes Spinoza’s God.

C5.P68 Let us now revisit and look more closely at Schelling’s substitution of Spinoza’s God by reason. How would the Spinozist respond to the replacement of *Deus* by *Vernunft* in Schelling’s amended Spinozism? True, reason is not mentioned at the opening of the *Ethics*, but still, the perception of reason as divine is far from alien to Spinoza’s thought. Yet, before we turn to discuss Spinoza’s views on reason’s relation to God, let us note that the substitution of God by reason—in various manners and roles—was a quintessential part of the *Zeitgeist* hovering over Europe in the two decades following the French revolution. At the level of public worship, the French revolutionaries instituted the *Culte de la Raison* in the early 1790s, a civil religion which transformed French churches into Temples of Reason and developed its own ceremonies, festivals, rituals and even altars of reason.⁷¹ A notable philosophical manifesto in which one finds clear echoes of these developments is the so-called “Oldest

⁶⁴ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 148 |AA I/10: 120. Compare with Spinoza’s assertion regarding eternity, or God’s manner of existence: “such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth” (E1d8e).

⁶⁵ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 148 |AA I/10: 120. Compare with Spinoza’s definition of God: “By God I understand a being absolutely infinite” (E1d6).

⁶⁶ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 148 |AA I/10: 120. Compare with Spinoza’s E1p7: “It pertains to the nature of substance to exist”.

⁶⁷ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 148 |AA I/10: 120. Compare with Spinoza’s E1p15: “Whatever is, is in God”.

⁶⁸ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 148 |AA I/10: 120. Compare with Spinoza’s E1p14: “Except God, no substance can be or be conceived”.

⁶⁹ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 152 |AA I/10: 127. Compare with Spinoza’s E1p14c1: “God is unique”.

⁷⁰ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 152 |AA I/10: 131. Compare with Spinoza’s E1p13: “A substance which is absolutely infinite is indivisible”.

⁷¹ See Ozouf 1988.

System-Program of German Idealism” (1796–97).⁷² This one-page manifesto calls for “the overthrow of all bogus faith, the persecution, by reason itself, of all priesthood, which now apes reason”.⁷³ The remarkable short text continues with a call for a “monotheism of reason [. . .] a new mythology; this mythology, however, must stand in the service of the ideas, it must become the mythology of *reason*”. The new cult of reason had thus found its elevated philosophical expression in the writing of the founders of German Idealism.⁷⁴

C5.P69 To begin our discussion of Spinoza’s view of reason’s relation to God, consider the following passage from his *Theological Political Treatise*.

C5.P70 [W]hat altar of refuge can a man find for himself when he commits treason against the majesty of reason?⁷⁵

C5.P71 Spinoza’s exclamation ascribes to reason universal dominion, which one would otherwise ascribe only to the Master of the Universe. Figuratively, reason is playing a role in this passage that is otherwise reserved exclusively for God.

C5.P72 Another natural context in which Spinoza characterizes reason as divine is his discussion of the conflict between the claims of scripture and those of reason. Spinoza writes:

C5.P73 I am utterly amazed that man should want to subject reason, *the greatest gift and the divine light*, to ancient words which may well have been adulterated with malicious intent. I am amazed that it should not be thought a crime to speak disparagingly of *the mind, the true text of God’s word*, and to proclaim it corrupt, blind and depraved.⁷⁶

C5.P74 In this passage Spinoza is charging his adversaries with nothing less than blasphemy. Disrespect toward reason is, according to this passage, disrespect of

⁷² The manuscript of this text, in Hegel’s handwriting, was discovered and published by Franz Rosenzweig in 1917. The identity of the author of the text has been fiercely debated over the past century, and the authorship of H ölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel has been suggested by various scholars. I find Förster’s argument in favor of ascribing it to H ölderlin quite convincing. See Förster 1995. For the dating of the manuscript, see page 176 of the same article.

⁷³ The quotes are from a translation by Taylor Carman, which appeared in an appendix to Förster 1995: 199–200.

⁷⁴ On the identity of the author of this manifesto, see note 69 above. For a helpful discussion of the secularity of reason in German Idealism, see Kuhlmann 1993: 171–82.

⁷⁵ Spinoza TTP, Chapter 15 (G III/188). For a discussion of this passage, see Melamed 2010: 129–30. The metaphoric image of the majesty of reason appears also in the conclusion of Maimonides’ *Guide*: “He who chooses to achieve human perfection and to be in true reality a man of God must give heed and know that *the greatest king who always accompanies him is greater than any human individual [. . .] his king who cleaves to him and accompanies him is the intellect*” (Maimonides 1963: III 52; p. 629 in Pines’ translation. Italics added).

⁷⁶ Spinoza TTP, Chapter 15 (G III/182). Italics added.

God's word. While the passage does not identify God with reason, it associates them very closely.

C5.P75 In the *Ethics*, Spinoza argues that insofar as our ideas are adequate, these ideas are identical with God's ideas.⁷⁷ Similarly, in E5p40s Spinoza claims that "our Mind, insofar as it understands, is an eternal mode of thinking, which is determined by another eternal mode of thinking, and this again by another, and so on, to infinity; so that together, they all constitute God's eternal and infinite intellect". Neither of these claims identifies God with the human intellect, yet they do open the possibility for a certain progress by which we acquire more adequate ideas (insofar as our mind *understands*) and thus become *more rational*, and, at least infinitesimally, *more like God*.

C5.P76 In recent years, Michael Della Rocca has advanced a fascinating interpretation of Spinoza according to which Spinoza's strict rationalism commits him not only to the—in itself very strong—claim that everything must have a reason, but that the ultimate reason for all things must be *reason* or intelligibility itself:

C5.P77 Spinoza single-mindedly digs and digs until we find that the phenomenon in question is nothing but some form of intelligibility itself, of explicability itself.⁷⁸

C5.P78 Della Rocca calls this element of his interpretation of Spinoza "the twofold use of the Principle of Sufficient Reason". First, reason requires that everything be explained; then reason claims to be the ultimate explanation of everything.⁷⁹ Intriguingly, Schelling reaches a conclusion very close to this one: namely, reason is not only the ground of all things,⁸⁰ but it must also be the ground of itself. Thus, explaining the proposition of §3 ("Reason is simply one and simply self-identical"), Schelling writes:

C5.P79 Were this not so, the being of reason [*von dem Seyn der Vernunft*] would require some additional ground other than reason itself.⁸¹

C5.P80 Taking reason to be self-grounding or self-conceived is—in the Spinozist lingo—nothing short of identifying it as the substance, or God. While Della Rocca never explicitly identifies reason as God, his second use of the Principle

⁷⁷ See E2p11c, E2p34d, and E2p38d. For a very helpful discussion of this issue, see Della Rocca 1996: 53–9.

⁷⁸ Della Rocca 2008: 2. ⁷⁹ Della Rocca 2008: 8.

⁸⁰ Schelling: "Everything is in reason" (*Presentation*, §2). Fichte and Schelling 2012: 146 |AA I/10: 117.

⁸¹ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 147 |AA I/10: 118.

of Sufficient Reason—the requirement that everything must be ultimately conceived through reason—places reason squarely in this eminent role.

- C5.P81 Before concluding this section, let me raise one small worry. When we speak of reason as substituting God, one might be tempted to think that what is at stake is some sort of celebration or adoration of the human, *finite*, rational capacities (this was indeed the very point of the French Revolutionists' *Culte de la raison*). This is not, however, the view of either Spinoza or Schelling. Clearly, for Spinoza, God's intellect is elevated far above the human intellect.⁸² Schelling, too, makes clear that his understanding of reason should not be identified with the thinking of the finite subjects.⁸³ It is not only that Schelling's reason is infinite (§10), but also that Schelling follows Spinoza even further in claiming that “nothing, considered intrinsically, is finite” (§14), and then notes: “It follows that from the standpoint of reason there is no finitude.”⁸⁴ While, in the *Presentation*, Schelling replaced God with reason, he was *not* engaged in the cult of the finite subject.

C5.S4

4. Conclusion

- C5.P82 Unlike Schelling's discussions of Spinoza in many of his other works, the 1801 *Presentation* makes hardly any reference to Spinoza's key metaphysical terminology of “God”, “*causa sui*”, “substance”, “attribute”, and “mode”. I have argued in this paper that despite this appearance to the contrary, Schelling's 1801 *Presentation* essay is deeply indebted to Spinoza, not only in its form and rhetoric, but also in its core metaphysics, as expressed at the beginning of the essay. The key to understanding this metaphysical core is Schelling's substitution of Spinoza's *Deus by Vernunft*, and his ascribing to reason the role and qualities Spinoza assigns uniquely to God. In short, I have argued that in the case of the *Presentation*'s transformation of Spinoza's metaphysics, the apple did not fall far from the tree.

- C5.P83 Schelling's faith in the majesty of reason subsided in his later years. Thus, in his 1832–33 lectures in Munich he claims:

⁸² In a memorable passage in E1p17s, Spinoza notes that the human and divine intellect “would not agree with one another any more than the dog that is a heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal” (G II/63/2–4).

⁸³ Cf. Denker 2000: 395. Indeed, Schelling's transition from Fichte's “I” to his own notion of “reason” marks the emergence of “objective” or “absolute” idealism. See Beiser 2002: 553.

⁸⁴ Fichte and Schelling 2012: 149 | AA I/10: 121. Compare to Spinoza's E3p4d. For a discussion of the sources of finitude in Spinoza, see Melamed 2012a: 192–3.

- C5.P84 *The world resembles nothing less than it resembles a product of pure reason. It contains a preponderant mass of unreason [Unvernunft], such that one could almost say that the rational is merely an accident.*⁸⁵
- C5.P85 Notice that the timing of these lectures is merely a year or two before Schelling's lectures on the history of modern philosophy in which he announced, as we have earlier seen, that "Spinozism, despite the many attacks on it, and the many supposed refutations, has never really become something truly past, never been really overcome up to now".⁸⁶ If the old Schelling's faith in the authority of reason seemed to fade, his veneration of the philosopher of reason remained unscathed.

C5.S5

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⁸⁵ Schelling 1972: 99–100. The translation is quoted from Kosch 2006: 87. See her insightful discussion of the change in Schelling's view of the relation between reason and reality (87–121).

⁸⁶ Schelling 1994: 66 | AS 4: 452.

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C6

6

Schelling on Eternal Choice and the Temporal Order of Nature

Brady Bowman

C6.S1

1. Nature, Naturalism, *Naturphilosophie*: Some Complications

C6.P1 Because the concept of *nature* is so central to Schelling's philosophical project in its various guises and stages, it is natural to raise the question of his relation to *naturalism*.¹ What are we to understand by "naturalism"? Any attempt to define a term that has been used so widely and in so many different senses verges on hopelessness. However, there are two varieties of naturalism that are especially relevant in the present context: *philosophical (including moral)* naturalism and *theological* naturalism. Roughly speaking, philosophical or moral naturalism signals commitment to the thesis that what is real is coextensive with the natural world, especially as revealed by modern, empirical, scientific methods, and that no entity that is not obviously natural in this sense (for example, values and norms) counts as real unless it can be explained in terms of natural entities (drives, for example, or evolutionary advantages). Theological naturalism, in turn, signals commitment to the thesis that natural human reason on its own, i.e., reason unaided by divine inspiration or supernatural revelation, is capable of knowing what God is, that God exists, and what moral imperatives follow from God's nature and existence; this is naturalism in the sense of "natural theology".

C6.P2 Now, the very passages that count in favor of reckoning Schelling among naturalists of either variety also tend to disqualify him for membership. For instance, in *Philosophie und Religion* (1806), Schelling praises Spinozism as the last pre-Kantian relict of true philosophy, and Spinoza will surely be allowed to count as a naturalist in both of the above senses. Almost in the

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