

The Tyranny of Consumer-Capitalism and the Third Age of Revelation

Sean J. McGrath

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 humanity. 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 Blumenburg): 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.

Not surprising, 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 culmination of 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,¹ will reach its end

¹ The argument that historicity (the time of events, the in-breaking of the new), is bound up with Biblical thinking, and in particular, with eschatology, has been made so often, it is amazing that it is still controversial. The thesis was common to the Romantics and German Idealists and has been corroborated and explored by Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Alexander Koyré, Karl Löwith, Jacob Taubes, and Marcel Gauchet, among others. The argument, however, does not need authority to verify it; it is plain enough to see by comparing the historicity explicit in the eschatological notion of temporality in the Jewish prophets (especially the *Book of Daniel*) or the New Testament (particularly the letters of Paul) with the a-historical nature of the cyclical notions of time found in, for example, the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Dhammapada*, or the *Tao Te Ching*, or for that matter, Plato and Aristotle. No religious tradition is being elevated over any other in the argument. It is a question of recognizing the differences that make each of them unique, and recognizing the concept of time that launched Western civilization, with all of its dubious products

(*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* (the Western liberal State, which is for Hegel the end [*telos*] of history, actualizes the possibilities latent in the Jewish-Greek-Christian origins of the Western tradition), 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 anything yet seen before.

What comes towards us is not implicit in our origins; on the contrary the future will wipe the slate clean and bring into being the radically new, the unprecedented and un-prethinkable. This is not a vision of a return to Christendom. Nothing in fact *returns*: in line with eschatological thought generally, the end of time for Schelling is not a return to a previous golden age, nor a coming to fruition of that which was implicit in the origin: it is rather the irruption into being of an order of spirit that, while it takes up all that preceded it as its content, has its origins in something wholly other than history itself.²

What this means is that on a Schellingian view, the current state of the world is to be negated, for we have not yet become secular enough. 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).³ 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 *eschaton* is still to come, Schelling argues—and perhaps it must always remain still to come, the irreducibly futural. Its non-existence places the existing world in perpetual question.⁴

(not just human rights, revolution and liberal democracy, but capitalism, consumerism, and technocracy).

² The notion of time that Schelling develops in the Freedom essay and in the three drafts of *The Ages of the World* is decisive here, particular the idea that the past remains always and irretrievably behind us, or better, beneath us, as ground, which if it were to emerge into presence could only mean the destruction of all that it makes possible. See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2006), 28ff; idem, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason Wirth (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2000). On the notion of eschatological time, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (SCM Press, 1967), 15-36; Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford University Press, 2009), chapter one.

³ See F.W.J. Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung* (1831/32), ed. Walter E. Ehrhardt (Frankfurt: Meiner, 2010), 672-710.

⁴ On this point compare Schelling's late thought with Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford University Press, 2009), 9-10: "Apocalypticism negates this world in its fullness. It brackets the entire world negatively. Law and fate are the foundations of the cosmos."

I wish to compare and contrast the theologico-political relevance of Hegel's and Schelling's alternative theories of the end of Christianity—to develop the similar yet 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.

Hegel's philosophy of history gained widespread acceptance in late twentieth-century 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, was an undeniable fact. Its triumph over the Soviet Union in 1989 and its seeming unstoppable globalization, signaled that what Hegel called the end of history had in fact happened in our time. Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis is now widely disparaged as the wishful thinking of later 20th century neo-liberalism. The resurgence of nationalism, the resistance of religion to secularization, the failure of democracy in the Arab world—these undeniable facts are often pointed out as contradicting Fukuyama's argument. Far from ushering in a new age where ideological strife is finally behind us, late capitalism has created a global situation, which could just as easily be described as one of total war. And yet, one part of Fukuyama's prediction has come true: consumerism is now the last world view with sufficient global appeal to unify the human community. The nations that refuse to open their doors to immigrants are populations of consumers who still want access to the commodities on the other side of historical borders. The religions that survive secularization are no longer family transmitted traditions but spiritual options for consumers who are encouraged to shop for their identities. The Arab world that does not want liberal democracy is busy building shopping malls of its own, where it will consume the same products and indoctrinate their children with the same media as the rest of the planet. The present is far more dystopian than even Fukuyama predicted: it is not the triumph of liberalism over all other ideologies which has come about; it is the global triumph of consumerism which is occurring in our times.

It is crucial to note how Hegelian philosophy of history, as developed by Kojève and Fukuyama, leads to a resignation and preservation of the status quo. We are told that the achievement of global liberal capitalism (and its inner side,

But since classical antiquity, the cosmos has always been represented as a harmonious structure. And because law and order rule the cosmos, because fate is the highest power in the cosmos, *for this reason*, concludes apocalypticism in a monstrous inversion, the cosmos is an abundance of that which is bad. The world is a totality that keeps itself distinct from the divine, forming an auto-nomy in relation to God [what the late Schelling calls A1 become B]. Therefore, the world has its own spirit, its God. As the world does not contain its real source of power but is determined by an opposite pole, God is also held in tension at a distance from it. This relation of tension is mutual and determines both poles. The world is that which stands in opposition to God and God is that which stands in opposition to the world. God is an unknown stranger [Schelling's Christ, "the Lord of Being" (*der Herr des Seyns*)]. When he appears in the world, he is *new* to the world."

consumerism) 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. Schelling's philosophy of history offers us resources for naming the contemporary moment otherwise, as the *tyranny* of consumerism, which precisely because it is tyrannical, cannot be the end of history.

Secularization

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 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.⁵

From an economic perspective, 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

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest*, Summer (1989): 1.

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 [sic] 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.⁶

From a Hegelian perspective, the secular world is 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. Kojève could still read Hegel in an emancipatory sense. He heralds the rise of the homogenous state after the disappearance of the churches and the demise of the nation state as the destiny of the human race, to realize thereby the spiritual principles of liberty and equality.⁷ For Kojève, the homogenous state is the last stage in human history, when the stable achievement of liberal ideals brings the dialectic of spirit to an end; in a free society of equals, spirit no longer has anything to strive for. 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

⁶ Ibid., 16.

⁷ Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nicolls (Cornell University Press, 1980).

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. This free society will be capitalist not communist, according to Kojève, because capitalism alone can generate the wealth needed for universal human prosperity.

Fukuyama's 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 apparent 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 strive rafter transcendence may have gone extinct in the process, Fukuyama is confident that a modest degree of enjoyment, if not 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 thesis of consumerism as the end of history. The homogenous state, if it has in fact been achieved in our times, cannot be the end of history 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. Equality and liberty are precisely what cannot survive the conjunction of consumerism and capitalism. Consumerism homogenizes, to be sure, but it does not liberate, quite the contrary. Contemporary secular society is dominated by 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 monoculture 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, consumer-capitalism has resuscitated that oldest of human institutions: slavery.⁸ 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 in the present article to elaborate the nature of the new forms of tyranny unique to our era. I will briefly name and describe three: *tyranny over desire*, *tyranny over knowing*, and *tyranny over community*. 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 community, 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, regardless of the cost to traditional societies and local economies.

The tyranny over desire. Consumerism is a spirituality grounded in the 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

⁸ See Hilaire Belloc's idiosyncratic but brilliant *The Servile State* (London & Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1912). For a more up to date version of the same thesis, see the devastating analysis of the economics of the new India in Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

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.⁹ 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."¹⁰ 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 insists he is merely 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

⁹Slavoj Žižek, "The Superego and the Act," lecture given in 1999 at the European Graduate School. <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/the-superego-and-the-act/>.

¹⁰Wilfred Sellars, "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," in *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, edited by Robert Colodny (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 35-78. Reprinted in Wilfred Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd; London, and The Humanities Press: New York, 1963).

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.”¹¹ 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 community. While it is apparently boundlessly permissive in the private sphere, where the individual is ‘free’ to believe anything he likes (one of the basic lies by which consumerism functions, for a private sphere that is forbidden to express itself publicly is hardly free), consumerism 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.

It is crucial to note that, like Marx, Fukuyama adds that the catalyst in the achievement of cultural and political homogeneity 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.”¹² 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 consumerism 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 Schelling has an even more emphatic critique to make. Has consumerism not in fact twisted Christianity into its opposite? As a product of Christianity itself, is consumerism not an *inversion* of the second principle, that is, would Schelling not call our consumer-capitalist homogeneous society the political incarnation of anti-Christ? The person, the site of the primordial decision for good or for evil, becomes an atomistic center of competing desire, with no essential connection to others; the common good becomes quantifiable economic efficiency and utility, GDP; the desire for transcendence becomes the need for constant new distraction.

¹¹ Ibid, 173.

¹² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992), xv.

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 teleology 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. His philosophy of history calls on us to 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 *Aufhebungsdialektik* 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.¹³ 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

¹³ Edward Allen Beach, *The Potencies of God(s)* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 113.

to be lacking in truth, one-sided, and unsustainable. It literally turns into its successor, or rather, turns inside out 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, eschatological 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 displace without invalidating all historical forms of church and state. 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.¹⁴ 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

¹⁴For a summary of the late Schelling's political philosophy, see Christian Danz, "Die irdische Gott: Religion und Staat im Spätwerk Schellings," *Schelling Studien* 1 (2013): 25-49.

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 (*eschaton*) 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.¹⁵

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 Christianity will remain no less an era of revelation:

¹⁵Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 673.

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 a 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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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 (Phil 2:7), so is reason in the late Schelling only truly itself when it empties itself, renounces its own interior world 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," 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 metaphysical empiricism 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 God of the crucified and risen Christ will be vindicated at the end of history as truly divine. In the age of philosophical religion, what was received as alien and other than reason

¹⁶Schelling, *Schröter Ausgabe*, VI, 720, 723.

¹⁷ Joseph Lawrence, *Schellings Philosophie des Ewigen Anfangs: die Naturals Quelle der Geschichte* (Worcester: Königshausen&Neuman, 1989), 196.

(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 *a priori*. 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.¹⁸ 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).

Schelling's philosophy of history offers us a way of understanding the contemporary era otherwise than as the end of history, when consumer 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 asocial-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.

¹⁸ Schelling, *Urfassung der Philosophie der Offenbarung*, 674.