

Writing Biography

Historians & Their Craft

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6. Did Friedrich Schelling Kill Auguste Böhmer and Does It Matter? The Necessity of Biography in the History of Philosophy

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On 10 August 1802, an anonymous review appeared in the influential journal *Die Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, a journal that was a bit like the *New York Review of Books* for Germany. The reviewer gave an account of a rather obscure pamphlet, “Lob der allerneusten Philosophie” — “Praise of the newest Philosophy.” It was a title ironically meant.¹ The broadside reported that a medical candidate, Joseph Reubain, had produced a thesis—very much like that of Friedrich Schelling, the young idealistic philosopher at Jena—that showed how death could be overcome. To the sardonic description of Reubain’s views, the author added—and this sentence was prominently quoted in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*: “Heaven protect Reubain that he does not meet a patient whom he idealistically cures but really kills—a misfortune that befell Schelling at Bocklet in the case of M. B. as some malicious people say.” On reading this, Friedrich Schelling became benumbed with fury and, I suspect, rather depressed with not a little guilt. His first thoughts were to seek judicial action against the ALZ or to go directly to the ducal court for redress. The death to which the review referred was that of Mademoiselle Böhmer—M. B.—Auguste Böhmer. Auguste’s death a year and a half earlier had had a cataclysmic effect on Schelling’s life, and he obviously still had not gotten over it.² Auguste Böhmer was thought by some to have been Schelling’s fiancée—probably not, I think. She was, though, the daughter

of Schelling's lover, Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel, who at the time of her daughter's death was married to August Wilhelm Schlegel, the great literary critic and one of the founders of the Romantic circle in Jena, of which Schelling himself was a member.

Now, everything that I've mentioned—and I'll try to give a more detailed account in a moment—is typically looked upon by historians of philosophy as overripe gossip—that is, if they themselves even know anything about it, and almost no one does. Bare mention of the incident—something like, for instance, "Schelling is alleged to have killed his fiancée"—might appear in the opening pages of a treatment of Schelling's philosophy, where a description of the philosopher's life is usually potted and planted in a corner, so that the details of the life won't mingle with an exposition of the philosophy. Indeed, almost universally, a discussion of the thought of a philosopher—either in a monograph or as a chapter or two in a general history of philosophy—is conducted in the sanitized space devoted to the philosopher's ideas, ideas not enmeshed in a life but untimely ripped from the life.

A couple of years ago, while I was working on William James, I saw this practice given poignant expression in an essay in which the author urged: "To provide a proper perspective for the study of James . . . attention must be diverted from his life, however interesting, to his published philosophy."³ Now, just what perspective on an individual could be gained by neglecting the life? James himself, I knew, would have rejected that proposition utterly. It was James, after all, who contended: "The recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done."⁴ In trying to explain a major shift in James's thought, I found I certainly had to reject the proposition that only the highly polished surface of his ideas needed to be considered. It is this proposition that I would like to argue against even more adamantly today. Put more positively, mine will be basically Fichte's thesis that the kind of philosophy one practices is determined by the kind of person one is.⁵ I believe that the intellectual historian—whether of philosophy or of science—must reinsert the ideas, the theories, the intellectual development of an individual into what we think of as a full-

bodied life—that is, an existence caught up in the tangle of personal relationships, subject to emotional turmoil, and expressive of hopes and desires—a life that will also be invested in certain approaches to nature and in patterns of logical analysis. But in respect to the latter, the key term will be "invested."

My argument will be local; but, it has, I think, general applicability. I will give an account of a major shift in the thought of Friedrich Schelling, though in terms other than the usual ones. Schelling presents a difficult challenge, yet one, I think, in which a hard case produces good law. He's difficult, since his philosophical ideas are exceedingly abstract and tied together with the sheerest gossamer. It would seem that the mundane events of life could hardly explain alteration in such ethereal speculations. I should say at the beginning that I take it to be the task of the intellectual historian not simply to display what individuals thought, not simply to describe what principles or laws they discovered, but to explain why they thought what they did, and why they altered their views, at least as regards major changes, in their intellectual outlook. Put another way, I think it is the job of the historian not merely to show the development of a series of ideas but to explain them causally, to render those ideas, as best one can, as the absolutely determined outcome of their psychological, social, logical, and natural environments.

There is another task of the intellectual historian, not usually discriminated. The historian, I believe, has to make the reader feel the urgency of certain moments in the life of his or her subject, to raise the pitch of understanding through the energy of the reader's own emotions. So in constructing an explanation of the alterations in the thought of a philosopher or scientist, the historian, deploying all the arts of history, needs to recreate in the reader feelings similar to those that galvanized the subject during the course of that individual's development. It's one thing to say that a person was motivated in action or thought by a burning love or a cold hate; it's quite another to get the reader to feel a little of the sting of those emotions in order to comprehend their power. The historian must construct a narrative to which the reader will give, in Newman's terms, not simply notional assent but real assent. The medium of historical expression

is also the message that, I believe, provides real understanding at a level beyond the notional.

In a short essay, however, much has to be abbreviated, and I fear I'm not quite going to live up to the ideal I've just described.⁶ Let me first sketch the problem that I've tried to solve in the history of Schelling's thought, and then use this as a test case. The problem, simply put, is this: Schelling began his philosophical career as an avid and committed disciple of Johann Gottlieb Fichte. But around 1801, he explicitly rejected Fichte's "subjective idealism," as Schelling termed it, for his own "objective idealism," or "ideal-realism." I'm not going to be able, in a short time, I suspect, to make clear all that's at stake in this transition. The philosophical conceptions are notoriously difficult and complex, and Schelling himself was ever attempting to find the right language in which to express these ideas—he often had them more as presentiments, I think, than fully articulated conceptions. In 1799, for instance, he undertook a study of Dante's poetry, since he thought *terza rima* might be just the vehicle to capture his philosophical vision, so elusive was it. But let me begin at the beginning and sketch quite inadequately both the life and the thought.

Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling was born in 1775 in a small town outside of Stuttgart, where his father was assistant pastor at the Lutheran church. The father became a professor of religion at the higher seminary in Bebenhausen near Tübingen. There the young Schelling was enrolled as a special student, since he was about five years younger than the other pupils. He was a frighteningly swift learner. Next, at the Tübingen Stift, he began his study of theology, again with students some five years his senior. Schelling had to share a room at the theologate with two other young men whose critical intensity would soon turn brightly stellar, Friedrich Hölderlin, whose poetic talent would soon bloom for all to see, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who became Germany's greatest philosopher in the early nineteenth century. Though the patron of the school, Duke Karl Eugen of Baden-Württemberg, tried to seal his wards off from corrupting influences, two powerful waves broke over the walls of the seminary—the French Revolution and the Kantian revolution. In the Germanies, it was a politically exhilarating time, not unlike, I think, the late 1960s in the United States. For Schelling, reading Immanuel Kant

and Johann Gottfried Herder began to undermine the standard theology he was fed at the seminary. His dyspepsia is indicated in his first published article, on the nature of myth, with particular examples drawn from the *Book of Genesis*.⁷ This essay appeared when he was eighteen years old. As he lumbered toward the end of his seminary career, he chanced to hear a lecture in June of 1793 by an intellectual firebrand, Johann Gottlieb Fichte. Schelling fell under the spell of this bewitching thinker.

Fichte had argued, in the various versions of his *Wissenschaftslehre*, for what he thought the ineluctable implications of a strict Kantianism—so strict, in fact, that Kant himself would thoroughly reject Fichte's version. Kant, Fichte argued, was correct in reducing the formal structures of experienced reality to the subjective structures of the ego. But had Kant the courage of Fichte's convictions, he would have gone further and shown that no theoretical ground existed for confirming anything beyond the self, certainly no thing-in-itself that might restrict the freedom of the ego. According to Fichte, with the elimination of the thing-in-itself we would have to conclude that all experience resulted from the ego. Even the ego itself, he maintained, was the product of its own self-positing. He argued that all individuals, as soon as they became conscious of the world around them, implicitly had to be conscious of themselves as well, conscious that their representations were connected in a continuous and identical activity of thought. By taking itself up at each moment through self-recognition—what Fichte called "self-positing"—the ego reproduced itself as an identical flow of consciousness. The ego was simply this self-reflective, flowing activity, nothing more—no underlying Cartesian substance that thinks, only the activity itself.⁸ Thus the ego was author of itself and its world. As Fichte wrote the philosopher Friedrich Jacobi: "You are a well known realist, and I a transcendental idealist, more uncompromising than Kant was; for he still had as a given a manifold of experience—but God knows how and where it came from. I rather maintain—these are hard words—that the manifold of sense has been produced by us out of our own creative faculty."⁹ Well, this was the second phase of the Kantian revolution that ignited Schelling's imagination.

Late in the summer of 1795, Schelling completed his theological studies and then finished with orthodoxy as well. He had no inclination or

intention to follow in his father's footsteps. The marker of this resolution appeared in print under the title *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus*, published when he was only twenty years old. I stress his age, since it makes clear that Schelling was a philosophical Wunderkind, and his reputation as a kind of conceptual Mozart was beginning to take wing. In these *Philosophische Briefe*, he waged a polemic against those pseudo-Kantians—some of his own theology professors—who used the master's moral arguments in an attempt to prove God's existence as a thing-in-itself.¹⁰ With the righteous indignation of the newly converted, he insisted upon the inconceivability and the contradictions involved in any reference to a thing-in-itself. Schelling's rejection of the route for which his seminary days had prepared him meant only one real possibility for his immediate future—academic servitude.

Schelling became a tutor to the family of the very wealthy Baron von Riedesel in Stuttgart. He followed his two young wards to the University of Leipzig to help them in their study of law, which meant that Schelling himself had to learn the law first. While at Leipzig he also attended lectures in a variety of natural sciences, including medicine, which he thought he could completely master in a few years—at least that's what he told his parents.¹¹ During the two years that he was occupied as tutor, he completed several large philosophical tracts, which made his reputation incandescent. The most durable of these tracts was his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, published in 1797.¹² In this book, Schelling attempted to carry out the second phase of the Fichtean project. The first phase, with which Schelling would continue to occupy himself, was the effort to derive from the structures of the ego the basic features of experience, including its material content. The second phase, one that Fichte himself never bothered about, was *Naturphilosophie*. Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* had the task of beginning with a refined understanding of nature, that is, a nature articulated with the help of the latest empirical, scientific theories—those, for instance, of Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier in chemistry and Alexander von Humboldt in electrophysiology—and then of showing how these scientifically constructed natural phenomena and their relationships could be regressively chased back into the ego as their only possible source. Schelling's *Ideen*

became the fundamental document for *romantische Naturphilosophie* during the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The signal idea to which the other Romantics resonated was the proposal that the absolute ego created both the empirical ego and nature in reciprocal relation. Under this conception, to explore nature, to understand nature, was simply to understand the self. This relationship between nature and the self, however, could be comprehended not only by scientific investigation of nature but also by aesthetic appreciation of mind in nature. As Schelling put it a few years later: "The objective world is simply the original, though unconscious, poetry of the mind [Geist]."¹³ These ideas, which would become the core of the Romantic legacy, had a tremendous effect on Schelling's contemporaries—philosophical, scientific, and literary—in both Germany and England. Alexander von Humboldt, for instance, endorsed Schelling's metaphysics, for he realized that when he went into the jungles of South America, to which he traveled in 1799, he had discovered in those exotic climes the self that he truly was. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the great English Romantic poet, simply palmed off large parts of Schelling's *Ideen* as his own in his *Biographia literaria*.

Because of Schelling's several astounding publications, certain individuals at Jena, Fichte principal among them, wanted to get him a position at the university. The main obstacle to his appointment, and initially a barrier the size of the Harz Mountains, was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who, as privy counselor to the duke of Saxe-Weimar, could promote or thwart such an appointment. Goethe read Schelling's *Ideen*, and he balked. Goethe wrote to Friedrich Schiller, the great poet who was teaching at Jena:

On reading Schelling's book [*Ideen*], I've had other thoughts, which we must more thoroughly pursue. I gladly grant that it is not nature that we know, but that she is taken up by us according to certain forms and abilities of our mind. . . . [Yet] you know how closely I hold to the idea of the internal purposiveness [*Zweckmässigkeit*] of organic nature. . . . Let the idealist attack things-in-themselves as he wishes, he will yet stumble on things outside himself before he anticipates them; and, as it seems to me, they always cross him up at the first meeting, just as the Chinese is nonplussed by the chaffing dish.¹⁴

Goethe thoroughly disliked the suggestion that nature was nonobjective, not thoroughly real, lacking her own peculiar ways. He was not going to help in the appointment. Schiller, however, engineered a wine soiree to which both Goethe and Schelling were invited. The great poet was unexpectedly charmed by the young philosopher. The Schelling he met had, as Goethe wrote to a friend, "a very clear, energetic, and, according to the latest fashion, a well-organized head on his shoulders." And below the shoulders, as he assured his friend, the minister Voigt, the young man gave "no hint of being a sansculotte"—unlike Fichte, presumably, whom many at Jena thought a Jacobin.¹⁵ Goethe was surprised at his new friend's knowledge of optics, and the two spoke for hours on the topic, undoubtedly boring the other guests. Schelling likely let slip a few knowing references to Goethe's recently published *Beiträge zur Optik*, which he had lately been reading. Goethe became a convert, and quickly interceded on Schelling's behalf. As a result, on 30 June 1798, the twenty-three-year-old tutor received a call to Jena as extraordinary professor of philosophy.

During his first year at Jena, Schelling mostly associated with Fichte, Schiller, and Goethe. But during the next year, Fichte's very spiny relationships beyond this circle drew their final blood. Fichte had irritated his colleagues at the university by holding lectures on Sunday mornings, during the time of church services. He had also irritated the *Burschenschaften*—the student fraternities—by complaining about their drinking and rowdiness; they retaliated by breaking his windows. Goethe wryly observed in his diary that having a stone thrown through your window was "the most unpleasant way to become convinced of the existence of the not-I."¹⁶ Finally, Fichte irritated Duke Karl August of Saxe-Weimar, at whose pleasure he served in the university. Fichte's views on God were highly unorthodox, amounting in the minds of many to atheism, which the duke would not tolerate. In 1799 Fichte was dismissed from the university.

With Fichte's departure, Schelling began to associate more and more with those in the circle around Wilhelm Schlegel—the literary critic, translator, and cofounder of the group that became known as the Early Romantics, or Jena Romantics. This group included the poet Friedrich von Hardenberg (who wrote under the pen name of Novalis); Friedrich

Schlegel, the younger brother of Wilhelm—he was a philosopher, poet, and critic, and the real force behind the Romantic circle; Dorothea Veit (daughter of Moses Mendelssohn), a married woman who had just come to live with Friedrich Schlegel at Jena; Ludwig Tieck, the novelist—acerbically funny, and the light spirit of the circle; and finally, the very beautiful, charming, intriguing Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel, who was married to Wilhelm Schlegel. I have to say a few words about Caroline.

Caroline Michaelis was born in Göttingen in 1763, the daughter of Johann David Michaelis, the famous biblical scholar and orientalist. When she was twenty, she was married off to a country doctor, Georg Böhmer, who took her to a little mountain village, where she bore him three children; only her daughter Auguste survived infancy. In the small village, she had been excruciatingly bored. Mercifully, after three years in this stultifying town, her husband died. She gratefully returned with Auguste to Göttingen, where she met and toyed with the affections of Wilhelm Schlegel, who was a student at Göttingen—toyed because, though fond of him, she had fallen deeply in love with another man. After receiving his degree, Schlegel had to leave Germany for Amsterdam to take up a tutorial post; but he kept in correspondence with this woman, with whom he had fallen utterly in love. Caroline, in 1792, moved with her daughter Auguste to Mainz to be near her childhood friend Therese Heyme. Therese lived there with her husband Georg Forster. Forster was heavily engaged in republican politics and became a leader of the revolutionary group at Mainz. He inducted Caroline into political work, having her translate letters of Mirabeau and Condorcet. Her feelings for Forster spanned a wide range. She later wrote a friend during the difficult time of the French occupation of Mainz: "He is the most wonderful man; there is no one I have so loved or admired, or, again, thought so little of."¹⁷

During the spring of 1792, Austria and Prussia planned a nice little war with the new French Republic, since that government seemed to be in chaos in wake of the Revolution. Well, not so chaotic that the French Assembly couldn't anticipate the Germans and strike first. In April the French declared war against the Germanies. Initially, the troops of Austria, Prussia, and the many dukedoms of the German lands captured several French cities on the way to Paris. However, unaccountably, the French

didn't collapse and return to the ancient order. The initial wave of German successes finally crashed against debilitating dysentery, shortage of food, and a regrouped French force, which now began moving the enemy armies out of France and back into Germany. Indeed, the French troops began taking German cities in the Rhineland, and finally Mainz fell. Forster's wife, Therese, with their two children, abandoned the city; but Forster remained to help establish a new democratic government. He thus dared treason, braced only with an enlightened faith in democracy and Caroline Böhmer by his side. Caroline moved into his house to help secure the new dispensation, and thus herself became, in the eyes of the opposing German authorities, a dangerous and degenerate traitor.

During the French occupation of Mainz, Caroline had a brief liaison with a French lieutenant, Jean Baptiste Dubois Crancé. It lasted only about a month and a half. He had to depart in advance of the counterattacking German armies. The city was put under siege, but Caroline escaped with Auguste. However, on the way back to Braunschweig, where her mother now lived, they were captured. Caroline was thought to be the mistress of Forster—she was called the whore of the Revolution. She was thrown into prison with her daughter. In these wretched conditions, with many of the Mainz revolutionaries going to the gallows just outside her cell, she discovered that she was pregnant with the French lieutenant's child. In this pitiable state, she wrote to all her friends and those of her father. Wilhelm von Humboldt and her brother Philip bargained with the Prussian king for her release. Meanwhile, the faithful Wilhelm Schlegel rushed to her side with the poison she had requested, to end her misery and her disgrace. Before she could take the fatal draught, she was released on her brother's bond and promise. Schlegel brought her to Leipzig, and there arranged for his brother, Friedrich, to care for her during her pregnancy, while he returned to Amsterdam to earn the money necessary to keep them all going.

Friedrich Schlegel, who would be the instigator of the Romantic movement in Jena, was a man of remarkable intellectual gifts, with a genius for love, and, as it turned out, hate. Friedrich fell deeply in love with this pregnant radical, the woman he thought destined for his own brother. He stayed with Caroline through her pregnancy and the baptism of the infant,

whom Friedrich referred to as the little Citizen Wilhelm Julius Cranz; the child died shortly after baptism.

Caroline returned with her daughter to her mother's house in Braunschweig, and in July 1795 Wilhelm Schlegel came from Amsterdam to be with them. Caroline wrote Friedrich Schlegel that his brother now preferred to speak and write in French and that he "thinks differently of my friends, the republicans, and is certainly no longer an aristocrat. . . . And I will soon teach him passion—then will my instruction be complete."¹⁸ The next year the instruction seemed to have taken, for they married, and then immediately moved to Jena, where Schlegel had been called to the university. Caroline helped in her husband's literary ventures, commenting on his translations of Shakespeare into German and even writing some essays under his name. Their home became a favorite meeting place for friends sharing their temperament, which did not include the misogynistic Friedrich Schiller. He still regarded Caroline as a dangerous radical, and later referred to her as Madam Lucifer. When Friedrich Schlegel came from Berlin with his new love, Dorothea, along with Ludwig Tieck, and with Novalis living close by, the salon of the Schlegels was the place to be. And Schelling was there. They would gather in the evenings with some good wine and cold beef, as Friedrich Schlegel put it, "to symphonize and symphilosophize, and yes to symplaze-about."¹⁹ This group of friends constituted the Jena Romantics, and their interactions gave rise to the literary, philosophical, and scientific movement of that name.

From the beginning, Caroline found the young philosopher Schelling—he was twelve years her junior—to be a fascinating intellect, and more. Initially they waged the typical sexual-intellectual wars that bespoke an underlying deeper attraction. She gave an account of their preliminary skirmishes to Novalis in a letter in the fall of 1799: "Concerning Schelling, no one ever dropped so impenetrable a veil. And though I cannot be together with him more than six minutes without a fight breaking out, he is far and away the most interesting person I know. I wish we would see him more often and more intimately. Then there really would be a wrangle. He is constantly wary of me and the irony of the Schlegel family. He is always rather tense, and I have not yet found the secret to loosen him up.

Recently we celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday. He has time to become more relaxed."²⁰

The bantering battles between Caroline and Schelling gradually faded into a deep love. She would later pour out her feelings: "I am yours, I love you, I revere you, no hour passes that I do not think of you."²¹ As the relationship between Caroline and Schelling gradually took form, that between Caroline and Dorothea quickly came undone. Caroline was obviously the star of their little society—beautiful, vivacious, demanding, creative, smart—a mélange of the traits that make intellectual men pliable and careful women distrustful. The tensions within the community reached a breaking point when Schelling consented to follow Caroline to Bamberg, where she was to consult the doctors about a minor but lingering illness. Neither Friedrich Schlegel, nor Dorothea, nor certainly her husband Wilhelm regarded Schelling's offer to accompany Caroline as an example of pure altruism. By this time, Friedrich Schlegel had turned against Caroline, undoubtedly because of his own dying love and for the sake of his brother. Dorothea became reserved, cool, and proper, as she explained in a letter to her friend Friedrich Schleiermacher, back in Berlin:

My entire manner with Caroline lies right on the border of common civility. Each day I make one or two short visits, but turn aside any closer relationship, since she is Friedrich's enemy, so why should I be concerned?—She takes daily walks with Auguste and Schelling, but that does little good, she says, so that a complete change of place will be necessary for her fully to recover. She will, therefore, travel this week with Schelling to Bamberg and there take the required baths. . . . They will leave shortly, and we'll be able to breath again. I doubt that she'll quickly return, perhaps never! But she indicated to Wilhelm that she would soon come back—just so that she wouldn't completely leave him, or he her.²²

Caroline consulted with the doctors at Bamberg and traveled with Auguste, who had just turned fifteen, to Bocklet, close by, to take the baths. Schelling, in the meantime, had left for a quick visit with his parents. When he returned to Bocklet, he found Caroline better, but Auguste now ill, apparently with typhus. The local doctor promised an easy recovery

in a few days. But on 12 July 1800, Auguste, Caroline's most beloved daughter, a young woman of infinite grace, refined education, and lively charm, suddenly died. Caroline was devastated. When he heard the news, Wilhelm, Auguste's stepfather, wrote to Tieck that "it was as if I had stored all my tears for this, and at times I have the feeling that I should completely dissolve into tears."²³ Henrik Steffens, a disciple of Schelling who had fallen for Auguste, wrote an anguished letter to his mentor. He mentioned that he was sending his letter without stopping to correct anything. He wrote:

I cannot bear to say what for me, yes, for me, what Auguste's loss means. That beautiful—I cannot grasp her death.—So full of life, so much promise—and now dead. I can't speak about it—Oh! She was more dear to me than anyone knows, more than I want to confess. . . . When I am able to work in peace, when healthy and in a good frame of mind, I consider everything that Jena has meant to me, the source of my higher life, that child stands before me like a bright angel. When I was last in Jena, she became even closer to me—and now. Never—never, after so many years, has death come so close to me—I've seen accidents and people die, but saw only change. I didn't see death—and now—well, I shouldn't renew the pain. Greet the unhappy mother for me.²⁴

Dorothea's response didn't touch quite the same emotional depths. She characterized Auguste's death as a "sacrificial offering for sin."²⁵ Schelling, however, went into collapse. He reached such depths that Caroline wrote Goethe from her mother's home in Braunschweig to plead with him to care for the young philosopher, who, she said, had "suffered so much in body and soul."²⁶ She was afraid, it seems, that he would commit suicide. Goethe quickly acquiesced and invited Schelling to spend the Christmas holidays with him. It is hard to believe that Schelling was not in love with Auguste as much as with Caroline. The conclusion is easy to draw, since everyone seemed to be in love with her, including her uncle Friedrich. The pitch of Schelling's response, however, had a sharper curve, since he was blamed for her death—and he did suffer despairing guilt. Immediately Dorothea gossiped that Caroline and her lover had not called in a proper doctor when Auguste became ill and that Schelling

had meddled (*pfuschet*) in the treatment.²⁷ And, indeed, he did alter the treatment prescribed by the doctor.

When Schelling returned from visiting his parents at the beginning of July, he found Auguste ill. He called in a local doctor, who followed the Brownian medical practice. The doctor prescribed opium mixed with gum arabic and tincture of rhubarb. The rhubarb was presumably to moderate the constipation that opium would induce. Schelling removed the gum and rhubarb from the prescription—he thought them too much an emetic for her condition—and saw to it that the opium was in a smaller dose than originally recommended. Actually, all of this was probably a wise move, since typhus kills through dehydration. But Schelling did confess to Wilhelm Schlegel that he felt terribly guilty because he had trusted the local physician.²⁸ These circumstances were sufficient—and the moral offense at his relations with Caroline so heated—that rumors of his culpability took wing, eventually bringing the charge that appeared in the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, quoted at the beginning of this essay.

During the time that Schelling bore the considerable weight of his affair with Caroline—and it eventuated in her divorce from her husband Wilhelm Schlegel and her marriage to Schelling in 1803—during this time, when he also felt the crushing guilt, however unwarranted, for the death of Auguste, he was moving toward a break with his mentor Fichte. Though Schelling initially endorsed Fichte's epistemological and metaphysical conception that everything exists for and in the ego, his scientific work and his developing ideas about the independence of natural phenomena moved him slowly away from that starting point. Nevertheless, as late as March 1800 he proclaimed, in his *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, that his position was essentially the same as that of the author of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

But during this time of reconsideration of his philosophical stance, from the beginning of 1801, Schelling interpreted Fichte's absolute ego as an individual subject—one of many such subjects; and as such it, too, needed to be explained, not simply assumed. Schelling now believed that the explanation had to invoke an absolute, a state that was neither subject nor object, but both indifferently—something akin to Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*—whence individual egos and their world would emanate. Method-

ologically, this meant that Fichte's subjective idealism had to be subordinated to the one-time disciple's new objective idealism. As Schelling expressed it in January 1801, casting a mirror image of his earlier position: "There is an idealism of nature and an idealism of the ego. The former is for me the original, the latter derived."²⁹

The precipitating causes of the split between Schelling and Fichte, I believe, were manifold. They ranged from bitter feelings over intellectual politics to the solace of reconciling love, from a desire for professional independence to the recognition of subtle intellectual differences, and from the experience of the autonomy of science to the remorse over the death of a beloved.

The growing intellectual differences felt by Schelling, and his appreciation of the logic separating his theory from Fichte's are typically noted by historians of philosophy. I do not think, however, that these intellectual factors would have had purchase on the mind of the young philosopher had he and Fichte not been caught in the matrix of the other causes. What might seem trivially mundane and personal to a more purified ideal of philosophical comportment, I nonetheless believe, had epistemological and metaphysical consequences.

Fichte's subjectivism made occurrences in the natural world—including the unreasonable demands of love and the more unreasonable death of a young girl of splendid promise—somehow the ultimate responsibility of the ego. And from the emotional perspective—despite the logic of the situation—the responsible ego had to be Schelling's. A subjective idealism made other individuals solipsistically the productive responsibility of the self. A young philosopher, closed off in his study and communicating to his students only from the high chair of the German professorate, might imagine a world only of his own making and with an imperious gesture take responsibility for it. But that same philosopher, now pulled down by the grappling hooks of love and then dashed against the rocks of his own conscience by the death of a beautiful spirit, must, I think, have his isolated self torn asunder. Only the abandonment of Fichtean egoism and the adoption of an austere and deterministic absolutism might mitigate the responsibility for love and for death—or so, I believe, the emotional dialectic would have proceeded.

And wouldn't that emotional fuel be required to alter the path that one might take through a logical maze of ideas? That is, seen from the jejune perspective usually attained by scholars writing the history of philosophy or science, bare ideas have, I think, no power to urge one this way or that. From this perspective, ideas, as David Hume, for instance, portrayed them, are completely effete, impotent. Schelling, simply from the logical point of view, could have stayed on the path originally cut by Fichte, a path he seemed content with as late as March 1800. Nothing in the antecedent ideas per se required him to move as he had. Certainly the logical thicket became no less dense along the path he finally took; rather, it was fraught with more difficulties. Schelling needed emotional fuel and direction to propel him one way rather than another. His love of Caroline—certainly the arrow that pierced the solipsistic Fichtean ego to convince him of a reality beyond the self—and the death of Auguste—a burden impossible for a lonely ego to bear—provided, I think, both the impetus and the direction for his change of philosophical position.

The final push came from Caroline. She wrote Schelling in March 1801, as their desperate love hardened into an impervious shield against the world:

It occurs to me that for all Fichte's incomparable power of thought, his powerful mode of drawing conclusions, his clarity, exactness, his direct intuition of the ego and the inspiration of the discoverer, that he is yet limited. . . . When you have broken through a barrier that he has not yet overcome, then I have to believe that you have accomplished this, not so much as a philosopher—if I'm using this term incorrectly, don't scold me—but rather because you have poetry and he has none. It leads you directly to production, while the sharpness of his perception leads him to consciousness. He has light in its most bright brightness, but you also have warmth; the former can only enlighten, while the latter is productive. . . . In my opinion, Spinoza must have had far more poetry than Fichte—if thought isn't tinctured with it, doesn't something lifeless remain therein?³⁰

I believe Caroline was correct. Without the poetical and affective configuration of ideas, which give direction and power to those ideas, something

lifeless does remain therein. Schelling's own ideas could hardly have found a more loving efflation to lift them from the reflective plane of possibility and send them on the trajectory they actually took. Three months after receiving that letter, Schelling quickly published his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie*, which explicitly signaled his break with Fichte.

What I've tried to show in this essay is the general proposal concerning the nature of intellectual history, namely that ideas must be pulled along by more than merely logical cords. After all, from a set of premises, an infinite number of conclusions can be drawn, but only a finite trail can be taken. What, then, will force the decision to take one permissible path rather than another? I think it will be the usual springs of action—the interests, passions, and desires that can be comprehended only by unravelling the fabric of a life, rather than merely by dissecting abstract ideas. The historian has to unknot the skein, so that all the strands can be appreciated. But to be convincing, the good historian will also reweave the threads to touch the emotions of readers, so that they might feel something of the forces that drove the actors to take one path rather than another. I think that's the only way to produce real conviction, rather than simply notional assent.

To answer, then, the question of my title: Yes, Auguste's death, and all that it represented, mattered a great deal to Schelling's life—and to his philosophy, as well as to my general thesis.

Notes

1. Anonymous review of "Lob der allerneuesten Philosophie," *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung*, no. 225, 10 August 1802, 329.
2. The screed against Schelling was more than a veiled protest against the untimely death of a young girl. Franz Berg, author of the *Lob der allerneuesten Philosophie*, was a religiously conservative theologian who connected Schelling's ideas with those of the atheist Fichte. And Berg and Schütz, editor of the *ALZ*, also reacted against the Brownian medical theories and the Romantic attitudes that supported those views.
3. William Earle, "William James," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 4:241.

4. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 395.
5. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, "Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre" (1797), *Fichtes Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte, 11 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, [1834-1846] 1971), 1:432-34: "There is no principle of decision possible for reason: for it is not a question of adding an item in a series according to the rational principles governing the series; rather it is a question of the beginning of the whole series which, as an absolute first act, depends only on freedom of thought. . . . What kind of philosophy one chooses thus depends on what kind of man one is: for a philosophical system is not a dead stick of furniture that one can lay aside or select; rather it animates the very soul of the man who has it."
6. I treat Schelling's difficulties more extensively in my *Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
7. Friedrich Schelling, *Über Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der Ältesten Welt*, in *Schellings Werke* (München: Jubiläumdruck), ed. Manfred Schroter, 12 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1927-1959), 1:1-44.
8. Fichte works out these ideas in a treatise he composed between 1794 and 1795. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, in *Fichtes Werke*, 1:83-328.
9. Johann Gottlieb Fichte to Friedrich Jacobi, 30 August 1795, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Briefe*, ed. Manfred Bahr, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Verlag Philip Reclam, 1986), 183-84.
10. Friedrich W. J. Schelling, *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus*, in *Schellings Werke*, ed. Schroter, 1:205-66.
11. Friedrich Schelling to his parents, 4 September 1797, F. W. J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*, ed. Horst Fuhrmans, 3 vols. to date (Bonn: H. Bouvier, 1962-), 2:112.
12. Friedrich Schelling, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur als Einleitung in das Studium dieser Wissenschaft* (1797), in *Schellings Werke*, ed. Schroter, 1:77-350.
13. Friedrich Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*, in *Schellings Werke*, ed. Schroter, 2:349.
14. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Friedrich Schiller, 6 January 1798, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe*, ed. Emil Staiger (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1966), 537-38.
15. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Christian Gottlieb Voigt, 29 May 1798,

- Goethes Briefe und Briefe an Goethe (Hamburger Ausgabe), ed. Karl Mandelkow, 6 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1988), 2:349.
16. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Tag- und Jahres-Hefte* (1796), in *Samtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens* (Münchener Ausgabe), ed. Karl Richter et al., 21 vols. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1985-1998), 14:41.
 17. Caroline Böhmer to Friedrich Meyer, 17 December 1792, *Caroline: Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 2 vols., ed. Georg Waiz and expanded by Erich Schmidt (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1913), 1:279.
 18. Caroline Böhmer to Friedrich Schlegel, August 1795, in *Caroline: Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 1:36-67.
 19. See the Foreword to Friedrich Schlegel, 1794-1802: *Seine prosaischen Jugendschriften*, ed. J. Minor, 2 vols. (Vienna: Carl Konegen, 1882), v.
 20. Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel to Friedrich Hardenberg, 4 February 1799, *Caroline: Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 1:497.
 21. Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel to Friedrich Schelling, February 1801, *Caroline: Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 2:42.
 22. Dorothea Veit to Friedrich Schleiermacher, 28 April 1800, *Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Han-Joachim Birkner et al., 11 vols. to date (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980-), 5:49.
 23. August Wilhelm Schlegel to Ludwig Tieck, 14 September 1800, quoted in Gisela Dischner, *Caroline und der Jenaer Kreis* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1979), 154.
 24. Henrik Steffens to Friedrich Schelling, 20 August 1800, in Gustav Pitt, *Aus Schellings Leben. In Briefen*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1869-1870), 1:305. Steffens's reaction to Auguste's death, as his letter to Schelling indicates, was obviously profound. His deep affection for Auguste can also be gleaned from Caroline's characterization of his behavior with her daughter, which she communicated to Johann Diederich Gries, a Privatdozent in Philosophy at Jena and a friend of several in the circle. See Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel to Johann Diederich Gries, 27 December 1799, *Caroline, Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 1:592-94.
 25. Dorothea Veit to Friedrich Schleiermacher, 28 July 1800, *Schleiermacher, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 5:4:175.
 26. Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel to Wolfgang von Goethe, 26 November 1800, *Caroline, Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 2:19.
 27. Dorothea Veit to Friedrich Schleiermacher, 22 August 1800, in *Schleiermacher, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 5:4:222. Dorothea maintained that Caroline treated Auguste as an adult much too soon, which, along with Caroline's affair with

- Schelling, had a debilitating effect. She went on to say: "The Brownian technique, in this case, is not to blame. They had no physician with her other than a completely unknown man from the region of Bocklet, who was no less than a Brownian. To top the whole thing off, Schelling meddled in it [insein geflüstert]. They sent for a physician from Bamberg only as she grew cold from the waist up. Röschaub came and found her already dead. He maintained that her sickness was lethal right from the beginning; all the more unforgivable, then, is the confidence they showed in not sending for a doctor right from the beginning. Shortly—And now the orientation of the sorrow!—We are going to remain completely silent about all those people. I won't write you anything more on this, since I am simply too indignant."
28. Friedrich Schelling to Wilhelm Schlegel, 3 September 1802, in F. W. J. Schelling, *Briefe und Dokumente*, 2:432.
29. Friedrich Schelling, *Über den wahren Begriff der Naturphilosophie und die richtige Art, ihre Probleme aufzulösen*, in *Schellings Werke*, 2:718.
30. Caroline Böhmer-Schlegel to Friedrich Schelling, 1 March 1801, *Caroline, Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, 2:58.

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