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The Eclectic System in Cousin and Schelling

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Eclecticism is therefore the contrary of dialectic
—Macherey¹

Schelling among the Eclectics

On 29 June 1832, Victor Cousin announced to F.W.J. Schelling, “In a few days, I will send you a new edition of my *Fragments* with an introduction that speaks much of you. It is one of the most important things I have written and I recommend it to your attention.”² Cousin’s reference is to the new Preface written for the second edition of his *Fragments philosophiques*, which Schelling did indeed receive a year later. On 23 August 1833, Schelling responds:

I received with great pleasure and read with great interest the second edition of your *Fragments philosophiques*, evident proof of the fact that your political career has not taken you from science. Your friendship for me cannot be doubted from the Preface; I am thinking of giving an extract of it and a critique of the scientific part in a literary journal published here.³

1 Pierre Macherey, “Les débuts philosophiques de Victor Cousin,” *Corpus* 18/19 (1991), 42. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from French and German are my own.

2 Victor Cousin, “Letter to Schelling, 29 June 1832,” in Cousin and Schelling, *Correspondance, 1818-1845*, ed. Christiane Mauve and Patrice Vermeren, *Corpus* 18/19 (1991), 218.

3 F.W.J. Schelling, “Letter to Cousin, 23 August 1833,” in *Correspondance*, 222.

This promise of “a critique” was fulfilled in a notice Schelling published initially in the *Bayer’schen Annalen* in 1833 and subsequently, in revised form, as the Preface to the 1834 German translation of Cousin’s second-edition Preface—“your preface to my preface,” as Cousin dubbed it.⁴ In 1835, it was translated into French, twice: initially by Félix Ravaisson⁵ and then by Joseph Willm.⁶ It was to become Schelling’s most significant publication during the final four decades of his life and, indeed, Schelling himself writes to Cousin of his apprehension and “repugnance at having to explain myself on so many very significant philosophical issues after having kept silent so long.”⁷

Schelling’s “amical but serious critique”⁸ is wide-ranging, and itself makes explicit only a few of the issues that were at stake over the course of his twenty-five year friendship with Cousin; for this reason, it is certainly not my purpose here to provide a comprehensive summary. Instead, I focus on the similarities that hold between Cousin’s and Schelling’s conceptions of systematicity, and in particular an ‘eclectic’ tendency present in both Cousin’s and, I will argue, Schelling’s systems.⁹ My jumping-off point is a comment of Schelling’s on Cousin’s eclectics in the 1834 Preface:

We do not deny that psychology can be a useful preparation for philosophy in general (though it can never serve as its ground). But it cannot serve as preparation for a determinate philosophy, especially not for [the philosophy] here in question, to which it has no relation. As for the preparation that was subjectively necessary for this [determinate philosophy], the philosophical spirit has taken care of that in a much better way by means of the diverse systems in which it has successively served its apprenticeship.... This might, at the present moment, be no better understood than by something similar to the eclecticism which Cousin has set out with such truth and vividness (even if this is perhaps not the appropriate term) (SW X: 215).

4 Victor Cousin, “Letter to Schelling, 28 September 1834,” in *Correspondance*, 229.

5 This marked the beginning of Ravaisson’s long, if ambivalent reception of Schelling’s philosophy. See Dominique Janicaud, “Victor Cousin et Ravaisson, lecteurs de Hegel et Schelling,” *Les Etudes Philosophiques* 4 (1984), 451-66; Christiane Mauve, “Ravaisson, lecteur et interprète de Schelling,” *Romantisme* 88 (1995), 65-74.

6 On Willm’s role in the controversy, see Paul Rowe, *A Mirror on the Rhine? The Nouvelle Revue germanique* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000), 236-41.

7 F.W.J. Schelling, “Letter to Cousin, 27 August 1834,” in *Correspondance*, 228.

8 Victor Cousin, “Letter to Schelling, 28 September 1834,” in *Correspondance*, 229.

9 So, for example, there is more going on in Schelling’s rejection of psychologism in the passage below—let alone in the Preface as a whole—than could easily be discussed in the one essay, and I do not even attempt such a task. As this implies, I neglect many of the very significant differences between Cousin and Schelling, as well as providing only a partial reading of their systematic practices as a whole, isolating artificially, as it were, one significant strand of their thinking in order to bring out what strikes me as an important yet underexplored form of post-Kantian systematizing—the eclectic system.

Legible here, I am going to contend, is an ambivalent, yet unmistakable affirmation of something like Cousinian eclecticism. Similar marks of approval are discernible later in the Preface when Schelling remarks, “All that Cousin has written in general—both here and elsewhere—on the history of philosophy and on the manner of treating it is excellent in every respect” (SW X: 222), as well as in their correspondence, when—upon reading the Preface to the first edition of *Fragments philosophiques* in 1826—Schelling exclaims, “Keep going! You have followed entirely the idea of the true system.”¹⁰ In this essay, I make the following experiment: to take Schelling’s more-than-half-hearted approval for the practice of eclectics seriously, to see what happens when Schelling’s philosophy is read as part of the eclectic tradition—that is, I present a case for reading Schelling’s system as an eclectic one, “even if this is perhaps not the appropriate term.”¹¹ In the first few sections, I consider some initial reasons from the history of ideas why this is a plausible case, before proceeding in the final section to the conceptual meat of the argument, where I argue at length for the disjunction of the dialectic and the eclectic.

The Search for a European System

To his translation of the *Jugement de M. Schelling sur la philosophie de M. Cousin*, Willm appended his own Preface (the Preface to the French translation of Schelling’s Preface to the German translation of Cousin’s Preface), entitled, “Essai sur la nationalité des philosophies.” The title articulates what Willm took to be the central stakes not only of the content of the Cousin-Schelling controversy, but also of the very fact that these two celebrated philosophers from very different intellectual traditions were engaging with each other’s works.

Indeed, in all three prefaces, there is a pressing sense of something that has been lost in recent philosophical endeavors, a loss of common purpose and meaning—a loss of the European ideal. That is, instead of producing philosophies that try to speak to all European peoples and thus become “universally” intelligible,¹² philosophers are now, it is claimed, concerned with

10 F.W.J. Schelling, “Letter to Cousin, 16 April 1826,” in *Correspondance*, 204. On the other hand and unsurprisingly, Schelling does react aversely to Cousin’s insistence on eclectically mixing his philosophy with that of Hegel (“Letter to Cousin, 27 November 1828,” in *Correspondance*, 210).

11 While this is to emphasize the stakes of this reading in relation to Schelling, the stakes for interpretations of Cousin are also high. Cousin’s relation to German Idealism has been, as we shall see, a perennial sore-spot in his reception from the late 1820s onwards. Contemporary readings that draw his work into the ambit of German Idealism (Janicaud, Macherey, Rey, Vermeren) tend to insist on its Hegelian origins and invoke Schelling mainly to highlight their differences. I will argue that, when it comes to the idea of the eclectic system, Schelling is also an inspiration, notwithstanding disagreements and misunderstandings.

12 The Eurocentrism of such universality is self-evident and remains unaddressed in all three prefaces.

national interests alone. At issue, then, is the task of reconstructing a form of European thinking that overcomes national, linguistic and cultural boundaries in the name of a geographic universality. There is of course much to say about the socio-historical context to this felt need for a philosophy that could unite Europe, and particularly France and Germany, in the early 1830s: at a time, that is, when Europe was coming to terms with the legacy of Napoleon and the Restoration, prior to the rise of the Second Empire and Franco-Prussian hostilities in the mid-century.¹³

As Willm argues, in previous epochs the use of a universal language (first Latin, then French) ensured that some pan-European understanding was presupposed, even if not always attained: “There was neither a French or German or British philosophy, but rather a European philosophy. All philosophies were linked and understood each other reciprocally.”¹⁴ During the late Seventeenth Century, for instance, “thanks to the universality of the French language which forced ideas to be expressed with universal clarity, European philosophy could stride in-step towards its destined future.” However, according to Willm, “towards the middle of the Eighteenth Century, there was a great shift: from this time the different national schools began to separate more and more.” Now, each national school “walked alone,” alienated from the European alliance—and this is seen as a loss, for “the more national a philosophy, the narrower, more incomplete and thus further from the truth it is.” Hence, Willm complains, “At no other epoch has European thought presented a greater diversity than in our day; the more it has become nationalized, the more it has ceased to be intelligible to all cultivated spirits.... Never has it all been spread so thin, never has there been less of a European philosophy.”¹⁵

It is in the context of this somewhat fanciful genealogy that Willm reads Cousin’s and Schelling’s prefaces as particularly significant; indeed, he calls them “the most interesting fact of the recent history of philosophy.” They will, he insists, “contribute to bring together German and French philosophy and so prepare a universal philosophy,” and thus, through Schelling’s and Cousin’s endeavors, “soon philosophy, without ceasing to be English, French or German, will also become European, much closer to the truth, more understood everywhere and thus universally intelligible.”¹⁶ The ideal of European philosophy will have been resurrected, overcoming barriers of linguistic and cultural diversity.

This ideal of a pan-European philosophy is present in Schelling’s Preface

13 Another celebrated example of such intellectual pan-Europeanism from the period is Louis Blanc, “D’un projet d’alliance intellectuelle entre l’Allemagne et la France,” *La revue indépendante* 11 (1845). See further Christiane Mauve and Patrice Vermeren, “Le passage de la ligne: politiques de la nationalité philosophique sur les deux rives du Rhin,” *Le Cahier du Collège International de Philosophie* 6 (1988), 53-65.

14 Joseph Willm, “Essai sur la nationalité des philosophies,” in F.W.J. Schelling, *Jugement de M. Schelling sur la philosophie de M. Cousin*, trans. J. Willm (Paris: Levrault, 1835), xii.

15 Willm, “Essai,” xvi-xxii.

16 Willm, “Essai,” v, xliii.

too. In this essay, one finds Schelling, who is for some the very embodiment of metaphysical obscurantism, bemoaning the state of German philosophy thus:

Germans have for so long philosophized among themselves alone that their speculations and their language has become further and further removed from what is universally intelligible.... Just as some families separate from the rest of society and living among themselves end up—among other repulsive peculiarities—affecting idiosyncratic expressions only intelligible to themselves, so too with Germans in philosophy. After a few vain attempts to spread Kant’s ideas beyond their borders, they renounced the task of making themselves comprehensible to other peoples and instead now regard themselves as the philosophical elect, forgetting that the original goal of all philosophy—a goal often forgotten but still necessary—is to make oneself universally intelligible.... A philosophy which cannot make itself comprehensible to every civilized nation and be expressed suitably in all languages, for this reason alone cannot be the universal and true philosophy (SW X: 204).

Such criticisms of terminological mystification and jargon had been a staple of Schelling’s thinking since he first read the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* and form a central pillar of his Hegel-critique. Nevertheless, this time Schelling’s call for an ordinary language philosophy is occasioned very specifically by Cousin’s Preface to the *Fragments philosophiques*. It is in response to Cousin’s text that Schelling goes on to see part of the remedy for German philosophy’s penchant for jargon in a kind of Francification: German philosophers must learn good style from the French. He writes, “It is generally agreed that when it comes to the clear, simple and precise presentation of scientific matters there is something to be learned from our cousins in the west” (SW X: 204). Through the absorption of French philosophical style into German systematizing, Schelling claims, genuinely universal philosophy can be attained.

Schelling intends the above as a contribution to Cousin’s defense against his detractors. For, as Cousin points out in his own 1833 Preface, it had become commonplace to accuse him of betraying the French philosophical spirit by importing German concepts and concerns—in Cousin’s words, this is “the objection of Germanism repeated so often” in France.¹⁷ That is, Cousin’s detractors saw in his work of the late 1820s and early 1830s intellectual treason, a renunciation of the virtues of the French intellectual tradition in the name of a Germanic return to scholastic metaphysics and jargon: “Here is the most devastating objection [to my work]: all of it is only an importation of German

¹⁷ Victor Cousin, “Letter to Schelling, 13 October 1833,” in *Correspondance*, 225.

philosophy, and it is this accusation that stirs up patriotism as if I had introduced a foreigner into the heart of my country.”¹⁸ Cousin had made no secret of his admiration for and borrowings from Schelling and Hegel: they are his “two great masters,”¹⁹ and Cousin explicitly writes of Schellingian philosophy as follows: “The first years of the nineteenth century have seen appear the great system. Europe owes it to Germany, and Germany to Schelling. This system is the true one, for it is the most complete expression of the whole of reality.”²⁰

Hence, Cousin does not deny having imported German philosophy; instead, his strategy (in 1833, at least²¹) is to affirm both the international and the national character of his philosophy simultaneously. Hence, while Willm enthusiastically embraces the ideal of a European philosophy and Schelling insists on it as an escape from the false turns of Hegelianism, Cousin feels it necessary to be far more circumspect about this ideal in his Preface.²² He acknowledges his redeployment of German Idealist concepts and arguments at the same time as affirming the integral ‘Frenchness’ of his philosophy. So, having, as above, set out at length his debt to Schelling, Cousin goes on to provide a number of responses to the accusations that his fondness for “the new German school” has led him to blindly betray French traditions.

First—and most substantively—Cousin differentiates himself from German Idealism in respect to his psychological ‘method’: “My two illustrious friends [Hegel and Schelling] place themselves from the beginning in speculation; I begin from experience ... I start from psychology.”²³ Hence, he concludes there is a “general difference that separates me from the new German school, namely, that of the psychological character heavily imprinted on all my views.”²⁴ While this difference is fundamental to any summary of the Cousin-Schelling controversy, it lies outside the focus of the present essay.

Secondly, it is by means of a grounded and sober style that Cousin believes he remains faithful to France, despite it all. His style is French because it is precise, clear and free of jargon. This is evidently why Schelling comes to Cousin’s defense precisely on the question of style, and indeed Schelling states explicitly, “Cousin’s love for German philosophy has been criticized as an anti-

18 Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ladrangé, 1833), xxx.

19 Cousin, *Fragments*, xliii. He continues elsewhere, “Hegel has borrowed much from Schelling; I—being less able than either of them—have borrowed from both of them.” *Fragments*, xli.

20 Cousin, *Fragments*, xl-xli.

21 In the 1840s and beyond, Cousin will increasingly deny altogether any German influence on the development of his thought and, instead, trace its origins to a French spiritualist tradition beginning with Descartes. For example, in later editions of *Fragments philosophiques*, the claim that Schelling’s “system is the true one” is quietly omitted. On this point, see Lucie Rey, *Les enjeux de l’histoire de la philosophie en France au XIXe siècle: Pierre Leroux contre Victor Cousin* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013), 144-5; more generally, on the conflict between ‘internationalist’ and ‘nationalist’ strands in Cousin’s thinking, see Macherey, “Les débuts.”

22 In correspondence with Schelling, Cousin speaks more freely of such a European ideal; see *Correspondance*, 206, 225.

23 Cousin, *Fragments*, xlii.

24 Cousin, *Fragments*, xliii.

French tendency; however, on the contrary, he has faithfully conserved [the French] national character for which, as he says himself, precision and clarity are essential” (SW X: 224). And behind such French stylistic virtues lies the idea of analysis. That is, Cousin believes that what unites the French philosophical tradition is analytic method: he identifies it in Cartesianism, Condillacian empiricism and the later sensualists, as well as in his own speculative psychology. Moreover, he specifies with respect to the French philosophical tradition as a whole:

For me, the secret of the shared nationality of [French] philosophies lies entirely in the common spirit which presides over them, and which dominates their differences: this spirit of method and analysis, this need for clarity and precision is the French spirit *par excellence*. Here is our true nationality in philosophy; here is what we must take up and not abandon at any price.²⁵

Such a defense poses an obvious limit to the ideal of European philosophy embraced by Willm: style, particularly the use of analysis, is to remain French. Hence, Cousin’s tendency to analyze precisely means, in his view, that—despite all of his borrowings from German Idealism—his thought remains faithful to national tradition.

Thirdly—and this will be crucial for what follows—Cousin believes that he wards off accusations of Germanism by means of his overarching systematic practice of eclecticism. And it is with the invocation of eclecticism, in particular, that Cousin believes he can both defend himself against the treason charge, while still remaining partially committed to the ideal of a pan-European philosophy.²⁶ For Cousin, the very *modus operandi* of his philosophical enterprise is the constant appropriation of concepts and arguments from all other philosophical systems, whether historic or contemporary. Cousinian eclecticism is thus a form of “tolerance” which reconciles “inevitable diversity” in past philosophical systems by “taking advantage of the truths [each system] contains so as to draw out a general doctrine which will purify and enrich itself

25 Cousin, *Fragments*, xxxi-xxxii. Cousin writes earlier in the Preface, “I prefer analysis to synthesis, because it reproduces the order of inversion which is true, while synthesis, in claiming to reproduce the necessary order of things, runs the risk of engendering only hypothetical abstractions.” *Fragments*, xi-xii.

26 Again, this is a claim from which Cousin will later distance himself. From the 1840s onwards, he will argue that eclecticism is a distinctively French form of philosophy: “Eclecticism is a French doctrine and peculiar to us.” Victor Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie* (Paris: Librairie nouvelle, 1862), 280. See further Donald R. Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988), 11-12; Michael Albrecht, *Eklektik: eine Begriffsgeschichte mit Hinweisen auf die Philosophie- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994), 611.

over time without end.”²⁷ Or, as Cousin puts it elsewhere, eclecticism “looks out and discerns the truths of different systems ... to justify them and give them a legitimate place in the great city of philosophy.”²⁸ Systematic material is drawn from everywhere and is truly international in character. There will therefore be much material taken from “the new German school,” for philosophy’s task is to borrow, even from German sources. Consequently, Cousin writes in 1833 in response to his critics:

There is nothing to fear from contact with philosophical schools that flourish in other parts of this great European family, and we would do well to discern there, with wisdom and firmness, the good and the bad, to send what is vapor and chimera to the wind and profit from what is solid and true ... I dare to believe that [my achievement in doing this] is a genuine service that I have made to my country and it will sooner or later be recognized.²⁹

Eclectic appropriation, Cousin claims, is not itself German, even if it employs material from the German tradition extensively; instead, it contributes to the resurrection of a European philosophizing, for it plunders philosophical material from all nations indiscriminately.

A Potted History of Eclecticism from Vossius to Cousin—via Schelling

Eclecticism is international not only in the material it plunders, but also in its genealogy, which is characterized by cross-border negotiations: the very idea of eclecticism is born from Franco-German clashes and conciliations. The philosophical origins of eclectic philosophy³⁰ are to be found in Gerhard Vossius’ 1657 *De philosophorum sectis liber*, which exploited a passing reference of Diogenes Laertius to the otherwise-unknown Potamon of Alexandria to imaginatively construct a late Antique philosophical school (*secta*) that freely selected what was best from all other sects—a *secta non secta*. Vossius’ Potamon was therefore, following Laertius, an *eklektikos* [selector], and serves as a model for a late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century philosophical ideal that became extremely influential in the German academy prior to the hegemony of

²⁷ Victor Cousin, *Cours de l’histoire de la philosophie moderne*, vol. I/2 (Paris: Fournier, 1846), 12.

²⁸ Victor Cousin, *Histoire générale de la philosophie* (Paris: Librairie académique, 1864), 34-5.

²⁹ Cousin, *Fragments*, xxxii.

³⁰ The following brief conceptual history draws on Albrecht, *Eklektik*; Kelley, *The Descent of Ideas*; and three essays by Ulrich Johannes Schneider: “L’éclectisme avant Cousin. La tradition allemande,” *Corpus* 18/19 (1991), 15-28, “Eclecticism Rediscovered: A Review Essay,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59.1 (1998), 173-82, “The Problem of Eclecticism in the History of Philosophy,” *Intellectual History Review* 26.1 (2016), 117-29.

Wolffianism. As U.J. Schneider describes it, “eclecticism served as the ideal of intellectual freedom for those who had to make up their minds before starting a career within the philosophical or theological faculties.”³¹ It was not so much a doctrine as a call to autonomy and, consequently, a thorough-going rejection of sectarianism. Brucker’s monumental history of philosophy, completed in the mid-1740s, defines eclectic philosophy as follows: “For me only those are true eclectics who shed all prejudice of authority, admiration, old age, sect or other, in order to follow solely the reason one was born with, and to observe things and their essential properties.”³² Or as Christian Thomasius, the most influential German eclectic, put it, it is “to see with one’s own eyes instead of others.”³³ In general, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century eclectics defined themselves against three prevailing trends: first, dogmatism, or systematic philosophy—the eclectic ideal was a critical one, rejecting the false in all systems so as to avoid the sectarian transmission of partial and exclusive doctrines; secondly, a-historicism—the eclectic ideal involved a hermeneutics in which all traditions in the history of philosophy were to be read, interpreted and then selected from; thirdly, syncretism—the eclectic ideal required a reasonable and consistent selection of past philosophical materials, instead of syncretic, unthinking appropriation.

This eclectic movement received its definitive statement in Diderot’s 1751 entry in the *Encyclopédie*, “Eclectisme.” Diderot follows Brucker closely in his definition of the eclectic:

The eclectic is a philosopher who stamps out pieties, prejudices, tradition, ancientness, universal consent, authority—in a word, everything which subjects the crowd; he dares to think for himself—even ascend to the clearest, general principles, examine them, discuss them, admit nothing except on the testimony of his own experience and reason.³⁴

Diderot continues in a way that further emphasizes his familiarity with the German tradition: “The sectarian is a man who has embraced the doctrine of one philosopher; the eclectic, on the contrary, is a man who recognizes no master.”³⁵ Nevertheless, what is absolutely central to present purposes is Diderot’s invocation of a form of eclectic practice that breaks with the tradition—what he calls, systematic eclecticism. While for Thomasius, Brucker and others, eclecticism is essentially a protest against sectarian systems, “used

31 Schneider, “Eclecticism Rediscovered,” 177.

32 Quoted in Schneider, “The Problem of Eclecticism,” 121.

33 Quoted in Schneider, “The Problem of Eclecticism,” 122.

34 Denis Diderot, “Eclectisme,” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, ed. Diderot and D’Alembert, vol. 5, <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>, last accessed 19/12/2016, 270.

35 Diderot, “Eclectisme,” 270.

by those who did not want to be regarded as dogmatic, sectarian or systematic thinkers,”³⁶ Diderot propounds the paradoxical reconciliation of the eclectic and the systematizer. He writes:

There are, as we see it, two sorts of *eclecticism*: one *experimental*, which consists in reassembling known truths and given facts and augmenting their number through the study of nature; the other *systematic*, which is concerned with comparing known truths and combining given facts, so as to draw from them either an explanation of a phenomenon or the idea of an experience.

He continues, “Those who carry on combining—they can be called *systematic* eclectics.”³⁷ Elsewhere he writes, “This is the eclectic method ... to form a solid whole, which is genuinely one’s own work, out of a great number of collected parts that belong to others,”³⁸ thereby “constructing out of the ruins [of earlier science] ... a durable, eternal city capable of resisting the attacks which had destroyed all others.”³⁹ In other words, the eclectic *system* is one that absorbs into itself any scientific discourse that is seen to be useful or productive: one picks and chooses materials no matter where they come from, mixing together the ruins of old systems for the sake of a new coherent whole.

Cousin revives the eclectic tradition with a difference. Gone is the Enlightenment emphasis on autonomy of thought, non-dogmatism and freedom from prejudice; instead, Cousin accentuates the idea of eclecticism as a plundering of materials from the history of philosophy. This is done not so much to liberate the thinker as, rather, to effectuate an intellectual peace, with the philosopher conceived as peace-broker exemplifying absolute tolerance towards all systems from all traditions.⁴⁰ In Cousin’s own words, the objective of eclecticism is “to make these diverse systems successively more and more perfect, without managing to destroy any of them, by means of searching out and abstracting the portion of truth that each of them encloses and by which each of them is brother to all and the legitimate offspring of the human spirit.”⁴¹

Crucially, Cousin regards what result from eclectic practice *as a system*, and so is to be understood as a direct heir to Diderot’s invocation of systematic eclectics. While Cousin’s use of the notion may seem unremarkable from the perspective of the history of philosophy as a whole, in post-*idéologues* France systematization had not been a live option. Cousin, instead, very consciously

36 Schneider, “Eclecticism Rediscovered,” 174.

37 Diderot, “Eclectisme,” 283-4.

38 Diderot, “Eclectisme,” 271.

39 Diderot, “Eclectisme,” 283.

40 On the political undertones of this project, see Patrice Vermeren, *Victor Cousin: Le jeu de la philosophie et de l’Etat* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995).

41 Quoted in Patrice Vermeren, “Victor Cousin, l’état et la révolution,” *Corpus* 18/19 (1991), 5.

adopts this concept from his German contemporaries; Macherey claims, in fact, that “the general idea of a philosophical system” was “the one essential element” in Cousin’s appropriation of German Idealism.⁴² Out of the eclectic absorption of foreign materials a system is generated, “a vast and complete truth which encompasses and puts in harmony all the others,”⁴³ “an immense, harmonious whole.”⁴⁴ Cousin articulates the systematic nature of his philosophy as follows, “There is nothing more to do today but to separate what is true in each system, so as to compose a system superior to all [previous] systems.”⁴⁵ In so doing, he makes clear that, for him, there is nothing more to contemporary philosophizing than the eclectic constitution of the system: *all* that the system consists in is the selection of what is best from every possible past and present philosophical configuration.

At times, “even if this is perhaps not the appropriate term,” Schelling’s conception of the system also exemplifies this post-Diderotian tradition of eclecticism. I have set out elsewhere the philosophical reasons that necessitated Schelling’s commitment to an eclectic system;⁴⁶ for present purposes, a series of illustrations are sufficient to recommend such a claim. Circumstantial evidence is provided, for example, by Devin Zane Shaw’s characterization of Schellingianism in the opening words of *Freedom and Nature in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art*: “The philosophy of Friedrich Schelling has a remarkable depth and breadth. It can move, often rapidly, from Plato to Spinoza, from physics to mythology, from art to astronomy, from medicine to theology.”⁴⁷ Or equally, it is evidenced by Hegel’s criticism that Schelling “has ever pressed on to seek a new form, and thus he has tried various forms and terminologies in succession without ever setting forth one complete and consistent whole.”⁴⁸ Hegel goes on to diagnose Schelling as a philosopher who illegitimately revels in the improper confusion of discourses, and, indeed, it does not seem far from the truth to suggest that at the heart of the Schellingian system stands the imperative *to mix*: Schelling mixes dialogues with the *mos geometricus*; Spinozist vocabulary with Platonic vocabulary with theological vocabulary, and throws

42 Macherey, “Les débuts,” 38.

43 Victor Cousin, *Cours de philosophie 1818* (Paris: Hachette, 1836), 13.

44 Cousin, *De la philosophie moderne*, 12.

45 Victor Cousin, “Préface,” to W.G. Tennemann, *Manuel de l’histoire de la philosophie*, trans. Victor Cousin (Paris: Pichon-Didier, 1829), v.

46 Daniel Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The earlier tradition of eclecticism may have died after Wolff, but was still familiar to German philosophers at the turn of the nineteenth century. For instance, in his lectures on logic as well as on metaphysics, Kant defines eclectics as “autonomous thinkers [*Selbstdenker*] who belong to no school but look for and take up the truth wherever they find it,” quoted in Albrecht, *Eklektik*, 598-9. As we shall see, Fichte, Reinhold and Krug also speak of eclecticism.

47 Devin Zane Shaw, *Freedom and Nature in Schelling’s Philosophy of Art* (London: Continuum, 2010), 1.

48 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Routledge, 1896), 515.

in depictions of magnetic lines and mathematical formulae as well. It is in this way that Schelling envisages systematicity as generated, in part, from the appropriation of foreign discourses. Schelling practices an eclectics without boundaries of any kind, certainly not national ones.

Three concrete examples help develop this claim. First, Schelling's ambivalent approval of Cousinian eclecticism rehearsed at the beginning of this essay occurs in the midst of an evaluation of the relative merits of rationalism and empiricism. Schelling points out that the two traditions have been traditionally understood as utterly distinct and at variance: "In empiricism and rationalism [the philosophical spirit] has produced its highest opposition" (SW X: 215). In the language of the eclectic tradition, empiricism and rationalism have been identified as opposed sects, each with exclusive claim to the truth. In a move familiar to readers of his late work, Schelling goes on to argue that, considered exclusively, empiricism and rationalism are equally inadequate. He writes:

It is easy to see that one cannot attain the positive [principle], which encompasses the negative within it, either by way of empiricism alone, which cannot raise itself to the concept of universal being, a concept which is by its nature *a priori* ... nor by way of rationalism, which cannot escape mere intellectual necessity (SW X: 214).

Hence, Schelling concludes the two must be absorbed, as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, into a higher, overarching system:

Philosophy is soon to undergo a great reform which, in its essentials, will be its last and which will give a positive explanation of reality.... The opposition of rationalism and empiricism will at this time be discussed in a much more elevated manner than it has up until now And so there will occur the union of the two [empiricism and rationalism], in a quite different way than has been possible until now, in one and the same concept (SW X: 216).

The resulting system will have eclectically appropriated materials from both sects.

Secondly, at the end of the 1804 *Propädeutik*, Schelling makes similar claims. After running through "the *Stufenfolge* of philosophical viewpoints" (SW VI: 92), he insists that his own "final" system will be a "synthesis of the preceding systems" (SW VI: 130)—that is, he will reconcile together into one system the finite idealism of Leibniz and the dualist idealism of Kant and Fichte, which are themselves potentiated repetitions of naïve materialism and Cartesianism, respectively. The Schellingian system is thus positioned as "the

highest point of indifference” between these traditions from the history of philosophy (SW VI: 130).⁴⁹

Finally, the most evidently eclectic moment in Schelling’s oeuvre is to be found among the final pages of *Bruno*. It is here proposed that each of the participants examine one set of concepts from the history of philosophy to test out their truth. Alexander thus begins by experimenting with a materialist vocabulary, then Anselm does the same with a kind of Platonized Leibnizianism, followed by Lucian on idealism and Bruno on realism.⁵⁰ All four of them are concerned with locating and selecting those aspects of materialism, intellectualism, realism or idealism which are most conducive to the one absolute system. Schelling here acts out a process of systematic eclectics: in Diderot’s terms, the philosopher sifts through the ruins of past systems for the sake of constructing a final, universal one. Indeed, Anselm is adamant that such eclectic plundering of past philosophies is constitutive of the system as such. He claims, “reason expresses itself in a variety of shapes as it appears in philosophy,” and so the philosopher must make use of all these shapes to reconstitute absolute reason in systematic form: “The task which calls for our greatest effort is that of recognizing the one metal of philosophy, self-identical in all these forms, in the purity of its native state” (SW IV: 309-10).⁵¹ It is such a conception of the task of philosophy that makes Schelling a systematic eclectic.

Moreover, a key tenet of Schellingian eclecticism is here spelt out: every philosophical system, past and present, has been saying, in essence, exactly the same thing, notwithstanding the manifold ways in which this one truth has been said. So, each of the four systems plundered by the characters in the dialogue “turns out to be a version of identity-philosophy.”⁵² As Anselm puts it of Leibnizian intellectualism, “This form of philosophy too leads back to the one absolute” (SW IV: 321).⁵³ Eclecticism is therefore feasible because of the essential sameness of all philosophical utterances—why not appropriate material from other systems if they are all saying the same thing anyway?⁵⁴

49 A qualification is necessary, though: the conclusion to the *Propädeutik* rehearsed above makes a far stronger claim than that presented at the opening of the work, where Schelling repeatedly denies that these earlier systems provide any “positive” material for his own final system (SW VI: 73-4).

50 Cousin also conceives the history of philosophy in terms of four basic systems; see Rey, *Leroux contre Cousin*, 117-23.

51 Schelling, *Bruno*, trans. and ed. Michael Vater (Albany: SUNY Press, 1984), 205.

52 Michael Vater, “Translator’s Introduction,” to Schelling, *Bruno*, 63.

53 Schelling, *Bruno*, 214.

54 In *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language* (Chapters 10-11), I have made the further argument that: to say this one truth in as many ways as possible is, in fact, a significant metaphysical virtue for Schelling.

Systematic Eclectics

The above argument is evidently insufficient: any philosopher who made use of past philosophies to construct a system would count on the above as, to some extent, eclectic. So, my claim that Cousin and Schelling are two significant proponents of eclectic systematizing still needs to be fully justified, and in what follows I provide such additional justification by considering why calling a system “eclectic” matters, by, that is, delineating the conceptual features of a systematic eclectics.⁵⁵

The earlier discussion of the quest for a genuinely European philosophy made clear the geographical universality to which the eclectic system aspires. The eclectic absorbs materials from all traditions without limits. It is this internationalism that provides Cousin with what he considers his strongest defense against the charges of anti-French Germanism. He writes:

I will respond sharply that in philosophy there is no other country than truth, and that it does not matter whether the philosophy I teach is German, English or French; it matters whether it is true. Has anyone ever spoken of a French geometry or a French physics? And by the very nature of its objects, does not philosophy possess, or at least seek, this character of universality in which all distinctions of nationality evaporate?⁵⁶

The eclectic method is indifferent to borders, whether national or otherwise. As previous sections of this essay have outlined, the eclectic prides herself on generating the only truly *universal* system, one that encompasses everything; it therefore absorbs all national intellectual traditions, all regional styles and forms within itself. Cousin continues:

The name of eclecticism, which for a long time fell into oblivion and was scarcely pronounced in a whisper, now rings out from one end of Europe to the other, and the spirit of the nineteenth century has come to recognize itself in eclecticism.⁵⁷

The eclectic system searches out what is best “from one end of Europe to the other.” Moreover, such universality is not merely geographic, for the eclectic must plunder the *history* of philosophy too. Materials are appropriated from every philosophical tradition, no matter how historically remote or geographically close. There is nothing that escapes the eclectic gaze;⁵⁸ there

⁵⁵ As will become clear in the Conclusion, what follows is very much a description, rather than a defense.

⁵⁶ Cousin, *Fragments*, xxx-xxxii.

⁵⁷ Cousin, *Fragments*, lvii.

⁵⁸ Eclectic practice, then, involves an operation by which diverse, even heterogeneous forms are

is nothing that may not potentially be appropriated into the system. This is universality without limit.

As evident in the account of *Bruno* above, such universality is often conceived as identity: the essential identity of all philosophical claims, no matter what their time or place. Elsewhere, Schelling is even more explicit on this point: “What do I boast of?—[Of having] proclaimed ... the potential sameness of all knowledge no matter of what topic” (SW VII: 143-4).⁵⁹ That is, all philosophical forms have ultimately put forward the same systematic position, the very position of the eclectic system. Eclecticism reworks the idea of a *philosophia perennis* for the early nineteenth century. Willm is the most enthusiastic on this point:

In a certain sense, there is only one philosophy. According to its goal and final stage of its development, philosophy is one. But no one has attached his name to this one, absolutely true philosophy, not in Greece, Rome, France, Germany or England. It exists nowhere, but thinkers of all times and countries aspire to it, work towards it and contribute to it.⁶⁰

It is with these claims to the absolute universality and identity of the eclectic system that its *distinctive character* comes into view. An eclectic system which fulfils the promise of being genuinely universal must appropriate and absorb materials from all traditions, must perform, that is, the philosophical recuperation of what is other into the system. And of course Hegelian

absorbed into the system. However, in order for such absorption to be possible, a prior operation is required (a condition of the possibility of eclectic appropriation): the freezing of past forms. That is, in order for the eclectic to pick and choose from the discursive units of foreign philosophies, these units must first be conceived as distinct and abstracted past forms, separable from all other forms. They must first become discrete and rigid artefacts. Compare this to types of *dialectical* appropriation, for which the past must be put in process, made to move and repeat its implicit contradictions before our eyes. Dialectics revives past content; eclecticism turns past forms into still-lives, *pensées-mortes*. In so doing, the past is flattened out onto one plane, on which all such forms are arranged for the eclectic gaze to survey and choose from. In consequence, the history of philosophy is dehistoricized and the eclectic takes up a position of “historico-philosophical independence.” Schneider, “Eclectisme avant Cousin,” 18. Schneider makes this logic of the eclectic gaze particularly clear: the eclectic “escapes historical finitude” by taking up “a position from which it would be possible to judge all other [philosophies],” a position by which the history of philosophy is held “at a distance”—a distance, moreover, that denies it historicity. *Ibid.*, 17-8. Rey is extremely critical of this attitude in Cousin’s philosophy: “the ground of eclecticism,” she writes, is “the non-historicity of history of philosophy”: “Eclecticism grounds its superiority on the temporal position that it takes up as the philosophy of the present time, which places it in a position of authority and permits it to synthesize and overcome the doctrines of the past.” Rey, *Leroux contre Cousin*, 36. There is, for Rey, an ultimate “sterility” to this enterprise *Ibid.*, 38.

59 F.W.J. Schelling, “Schelling’s Aphorisms of 1805,” trans. Fritz Marti, *Idealistic studies* 14 (1984): 237-258, at 246.

60 Willm, “Essai,” xxx-xxxii. Cf. Schelling’s avowal of the *philosophia perennis* in his *Fernere Darstellungen* (SW IV: 400-1).

subsumption is the most obvious example of this kind of operation. On the face of it, the eclectic absorption of foreign material seems indistinguishable from such a dialectical operation; however, I want to set out what is specifically eclectic in Cousin's and Schelling's systems to show that there is more than one way to reabsorb foreign materials, that it is possible to *universalize without subsumption*. And there are initially two marks that distinguish eclectic and dialectic forms of appropriation.

First, contrary to the Hegelian translation of all foreign materials into a single master language, the eclectic system retains formal diversity at its very heart. This is why Willm sees it as an eminently suitable method for achieving universality in an age of linguistic and cultural (i.e. formal) diversity: to repeat his concluding claim, the eclectic system aspires to a "philosophy [which], *without ceasing* to be English, French or German, will also become European." This is not to argue that there is no diversity in dialectical systems in general or Hegel's in particular, but merely that eclecticism retains a formal diversity that Hegel rejects. Hegel's later critique of Schelling—an element of which I already rehearsed above—is premised on this very point: Schelling's system uses a bewildering array of different forms from a variety of disciplines that are not unitarily or properly speculative, according to Hegel. Schelling retains formal diversity, and this suggests that there is something non-Hegelian and non-dialectical, even *sui generis*, about the eclectic manner of traversing borders and generating a universal system.

Secondly, a genuinely eclectic system lays claims to completeness by virtue of its speculative extensity. As Cousin puts it:

Each [historical] system is not false but incomplete; hence, it follows that in reuniting all the incomplete systems one would have a complete philosophy, adequate to the totality of consciousness. This would be a genuine historical system that is both universal and precise.... It would encompass everything and reach infinity.⁶¹

"Reaching infinity" thereby becomes one of the cardinal criteria for evaluating the success of an eclectic system. This is a particularly important metaphilosophical virtue for those like Schelling who find categories like representation, adequacy and correspondence problematic: for Schelling, representation or reflection is an inferior mode of cognition because it presupposes a pre-existing dualism between mind and world.⁶² The genuine system, therefore, does not describe, explain or justify all that exists; it is not a reflection of it; and if this is the case, one cannot judge the success of a system

⁶¹ Cousin, *Fragments*, 48.

⁶² As Schelling puts it in the 1804 *System*: "We now abandon forever that sphere of reflection that discriminates between the subject and the object" (SW VI: 140), trans. and ed. Thomas Pfau, *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 143.

by the adequacy, truth or even coherence with which it represents reality. Instead, as Grant argues, the success of a Schellingian system is a matter of extensity. “Every philosophical construction,” Grant states, “undergoes the test of the *extensity* of its concepts.”⁶³ And he elaborates as follows,

[Philosophy] is ‘the infinite science,’ and cannot therefore be ‘conditioned’ by eliminating anything *a priori* from its remit.... The infinite science must test itself against the All.... It is the extensity therefore, the range and capacity of philosophical systems that is being tested.⁶⁴

So, the absolute system talks about everything; it is maximally extensive. In a similar vein to Renaissance ideals of the *omniformis* or microcosm, absoluteness is to be conceived as a consequence of infinite range and capacity in the system’s appropriation of foreign philosophical forms—an infinite mixing. Absolute extensity provides a viable metaphilosophical criterion for eclectic success after the ruination of representation, for the eclectic system operates by means of *addition*, by means of the infinite accumulation of foreign materials.

The consequences of this are far-reaching indeed; foremost is the elimination of negativity from this conception of the system. It is here that the difference between the dialectic and the eclectic is most stark: in Macherey’s words, “there is no room for any kind of dialectic” in eclecticism.⁶⁵ He writes more fully of Cousin’s system:

One can see immediately how this conception, despite its formal resemblance to Hegel’s, differs from it essentially.... It is enough to ... retain only those [truths] which are compatible and to reconstitute out of them a complete system of the true—one, then, that results from *the addition* of all these partial truths. In this exposition, there is no place for negativity—that is, knowledge appears under the form of an assemblage and not as a process.⁶⁶

Thus, Macherey concludes, “Eclecticism is therefore the contrary of dialectic.”⁶⁷

The eclectic system is additive: it perpetually accumulates foreign forms as a means of attaining maximal extensity. There is no negation, criticism or

63 Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (London: Continuum, 2006), 194.

64 Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 19-21.

65 Macherey, “Les débuts,” 44.

66 Macherey, “Les débuts,” 42; my italics. Cf. Uslar’s characterization of Schelling’s system: “The inner movement of Schellingian absolute identity is fundamentally different from Hegel’s dialectical movement.... And the fundamental difference is that Schelling conceives the inner movement of the absolute *without negation*.” Detlev von Uslar, “Die innere Bewegung der absoluten Identität bei Schelling,” *Studium Generale* 21 (1968): 503.

67 Macherey, “Les débuts,” 42.

skeptical *reductio ad absurdum*; it is a system without critique.⁶⁸ It operates paratactically, generating an ever-increasing assemblage of discourses, or, in Schneider's words, "replacing the exclusive 'either ... or ...' with the synthesis of an 'and ... and ...'"⁶⁹ This is the metaphysics of an absolute book: a system whose completion would coincide with the incorporation of everything true ever thought.⁷⁰ Instead of critique, then, the most typical operation of the eclectic towards a pre-existing system is to absolutize it: to take what is exclusive and limited in a body of thought and stretch it to infinity until it is no longer partial (and thereby false) but inclusive (and thereby true).⁷¹ To repeat a key claim from the closing pages of Schelling's *Bruno*, "This form of philosophy too leads back to the one absolute" (SW IV: 321).⁷² Cousin's treatment of eighteenth-century French sensualism in *Fragments philosophiques* provides the clearest example of this non-critical operation on foreign material.

Cousin begins by whole-heartedly affirming sensualist methodology—an unadulterated empiricism oriented towards the observation of psychological data. Where sensualism fails, according to Cousin, is merely in the arbitrary restrictions it places on such empiricism, namely, in its limitation of psychological observation to sensation alone. Cousin's argument proceeds as follows:

[Sensualist] philosophy observes, it is true, but it observes only the facts that agree with it, and it thus corrupts the experimental method with systematic views.... It is certain that on first

68 It is here one discerns major differences between Cousin's and Schelling's systematic eclectics and that of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tradition of eclecticism. The earlier proponents emphasize the critical nature of philosophy, whereas Schelling and Cousin return to a form of dogmatism. On Schelling's relation to dogmatism, the key text is Tyler Tritten, "Against Kant: Toward an Inverted Transcendentalism or a Philosophy of the Doctrinal," *Angelaki* 21.4 (2016): 143-55. Similarly, there is for the latter a total absence of emphasis on autonomy of thought. Cousin, for instance, seems to envisage eclecticism, in Rey's words, as "the result of a spirit who dreams of producing a philosophical system, but who, incapable of doing it himself, asks history to produce it for him." Rey, *Leroux contre Cousin*, 114. She writes elsewhere: "Cousin, as an individual, is nothing more than an accidental cause of the appearance of eclecticism: the necessary cause of its appearance is found in ... the labor of the history of philosophy." Rey, *Leroux contre Cousin*, 31. Schelling likewise insists that "the fundamental error in all knowledge is ever since Descartes the 'I think, I am.' Thinking is not my thinking, and being not my being, for everything is only God's or the All's" (SW VII: 148; *Aphorisms*, 250). Rather than eclectics resulting from the choices of a 'colonial' sovereign subject, it is the absolute that works eclectically.

69 Schneider, "Eclectisme avant Cousin," 23. On parataxis in Schelling's system, see Daniel Whistler, "Improper Names for God: Religious Language and the 'Spinoza Effect,'" *Speculations* 3 (2012): 99-134.

70 Systematic eclectics thus presupposes a univocity of discursive domains where all can be plundered equally, contrary to the Hegelian reconstitution of a hierarchy between what is properly speculative and improper *Vorstellungen*.

71 As I make clear in the Conclusion, Cousin and Schelling are never at any point 'purely' systematic eclectics; there are obvious examples of critical and skeptical argument in their writings.

72 Schelling, *Bruno*, 214.

blush one perceives in consciousness a set of phenomena which, decomposed into their elements, are reducible to sensation. These phenomena are incontestable and numerous.... There is a strong natural illusion to believe that this order of phenomena encompasses all those of which we can have consciousness.... But even if sensibility is the root of all our intellectual faculties, it still cannot be the root of our moral faculties.... Impartial observation destroys both the principle and the entire system in making visible that there are phenomena in consciousness which cannot be reduced to sensation—very real, numerous ideas which play a huge role in life and language and which sensation does not explain.⁷³

According to Cousin, sensualism attains truth through the absolutization of its empiricist starting-point. Its commitment to observation is taken beyond all limits, such that the philosopher no longer observes sensations alone, but all psychological phenomena, including moral values. Sensualism, as previously conceived, has been merely a partial sect, practising a limited, exclusive form of empiricism; to maximize this method is to bring sensualism into the one true system as something absolute. Cousin here performs an eclectic operation: sects are not to be excluded, negated or criticized, but absorbed into the system absolutely—i.e., all foreign philosophical systems are to be maximized without limit, such that the system exhibits maximal extensity. This is a system *without critique*.

The additive character of the eclectic system raises a number of questions, foremost among them whether it can legitimately be called a system at all. As already rehearsed, eclecticism was traditionally an anti-systematic enterprise, a protest against the reduction of truth to one finite set of doctrines. On the other side, proponents of the system have repeatedly criticized the agglomerative nature of eclectic truth. Three examples within the German Idealist tradition evidence this claim.⁷⁴ Fichte, for one, berates the pick-and-mix attitude of the eclectic: “Nothing has seemed more hateful and despicable to me than that wretched treatment of science in which one cobbles together all kinds of facts and opinions, without any connection or purpose.... Such half-knowing and incompetence [is] called eclecticism.” Reinhold raises similar concerns: eclecticism has “no system ... no foundational principles.... Under the name of *eclecticism*, a false, syncretic and cobbled-together aggregate of indeterminate, ambiguous propositions boasts of profundity.” Krug launches the most scathing critique, labelling eclecticism “anarchism” and lamenting “the philosophical inconsistency with which propositions from completely different systems are mixed together by the eclectic.” He concludes, “Eclecticism is therefore nothing

⁷³ Cousin, *Fragments*, xiii-xiv.

⁷⁴ Quotations in this paragraph are taken from Albrecht, *Eklektik*, 599-601.

but a *shallow syncretism*.” These criticisms oppose systematicity to eclecticism, such that no form of the latter could ever hope to meet the criteria for a genuine post-Kantian system. If this were indeed the case, then the “eclectic system” would be an incoherent concept.

Post-Kantian systems have, broadly speaking, two basic characteristics: totality and unity. Paul Franks articulates them in terms of a ‘monistic demand’ in German Idealism: “This is the demand that every genuine grounding participate in a single systematic unity of grounds.”⁷⁵ Franks goes on to show that this demand is conceived in most mature German Idealist systems as a “holistic monism,” a term he defines as follows:

Holistic Monism may be divided into two requirements, The Holistic requirement is that, in an adequate philosophical system, empirical items must be such that all their properties are determinable only within the context of a totality composed of other items and their properties. The Monistic requirement is that, in an adequate philosophical system, the absolute first principle must be immanent within the aforementioned totality, as its principle of unity.⁷⁶

As Franks points out, the demand for “holistic monism” emerged out of the foundationalism-crisis in mid-1790s Jena: in its wake, it no longer appeared theoretically justifiable to conceive of a system possessing one external foundation or ground from which all else derived. In Franks’ terms, a crude version of “derivation monism” (“the view that, in an adequate philosophical system, the *a priori* conditions of experience must somehow be derived from a single, absolute first principle”⁷⁷) was no longer plausible. Unity of derivation or grounding, at least as traditionally understood, was off the table.

The eclectic system is evidently not troubled by the totality requirement; indeed, the eclectic lays claim to maximal systematic extensity. It is with the monistic demand that it seems on shakier ground: when Kant criticizes, for example, “the mere confluence of assembled concepts” in a non-systematic aggregate,⁷⁸ the eclectic systematizer seems to have no redress. The problem is compounded in light of the prevailing orthodoxy in contemporary German Idealist scholarship⁷⁹ that the Hegelian incorporation of negativity and skepticism into the system proved the most successful response to the foundationalism-crisis. That is, its paradigmatic solution is to be found in

⁷⁵ Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments and Skepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 20.

⁷⁶ Franks, *All or Nothing*, 85-6.

⁷⁷ Franks, *All or Nothing*, 17.

⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 1929), A835/B863.

⁷⁹ See, for one example, Franks, *All or Nothing*, Chapter 6.

Hegel's insistence on bringing "thoroughgoing skepticism" into the system, thereby recasting the philosophical enterprise as a "pathway of doubt."⁸⁰ Negativity becomes the non-foundational first principle, and each part of the system is brought into holistic interconnection by appeal to the category of determinate negation. Such a solution is evidently not available to the eclectic who has banished the specter of negation from her system.

Nevertheless, the eclectic system does maintain some unity among its perpetually-accumulated discursive forms. This unity consists in their essential sameness: everything appropriated into the eclectic system is saying the same thing. To put it another way, it seems odd to question the idea that Schelling, for one, whose systems are often explicitly styled as monist, would fall foul of the "monistic demand." To repeat the key Schelling quotation, "What do I boast of?—[Of having] proclaimed ... the potential sameness of all knowledge no matter of what topic."⁸¹ There is a minimal form of monistic unity here to which an eclectic *system* does lay claim. On this reading, it exhibits both totality and a holistic interconnection of parts made possible by an essential identity of content, and, as such, it is at the very least a coherent aspiration.

The Impossibility of Eclecticism

The previous section described an unadulterated systematic eclectics that no thinker—certainly neither Cousin nor Schelling—ever practiced in its purity. There are, I have demonstrated, numerous moments of systematic eclecticism in their writings and, "even if it is perhaps not the appropriate term," it certainly describes, I want to insist, one tendency in their thinking. There are, however, endless counter-examples to such eclectic practice: one need not look far to unearth both Cousin and Schelling engaging in critique, arguing skeptically or even excluding vast swathes of the history of philosophy from their system. There is no 'pure' eclecticism to be found here.

Moreover, there are good philosophical reasons for this: pure eclecticism is impossible, "a philosophical idea that never really worked."⁸² The problem is as follows: to select what is best and so to become *eklektikos*, one requires a criterion for selection; however, such a criterion can only be justified by a truth established prior to eclectic practice. Rey writes:

80 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §§78-9.

81 One way to understand such unity is as the reversal of the Hegelian account of the form/content relation. For Hegel, forms are to be translated into a master-language to bring out the genuine speculative content they disguise; for the eclectic, however, such unity of content is not esoterically hidden, but exoterically obvious, and so the diversity of discursive forms is no barrier to unity. In the eclectic system, therefore, forms retain such diversity free from translation and reinterpretation. See Daniel Whistler, "The New Literalism: Reading after Grant's Schelling," *Symposium* 19.1 (2015): 125-39.

82 Schneider, "Eclecticism Rediscovered," 175.

Eclecticism is not the totality of past philosophies placed end to end; it is rather a conciliation of contrary principles founded on a selection.... [It] is achieved by means of a certain number of *philosophical choices*.... Yet, to choose, one needs a criterion. And such a criterion can only be found in a doctrine prior to eclecticism that makes it possible.⁸³

Hence, “the pure eclectic position is untenable since it supplies no criteria to distinguish between the true and the false in past philosophies.”⁸⁴ In other words, there are only two options for the would-be eclectic: either to begin with a pre-established criterion generated through non-eclectic reasoning or to give up on the possibility of selection altogether and so appropriate all forms indiscriminately.

Schelling tends for the most part towards the first option: he is more than just an eclectic on most occasions, and, even when he does practice eclectics most discernibly, he does so at the margins of his writings, in propaedeutics or epilogues. Cousin officially insists on the first option as well: he is adamant that truth drawn from psychological insight provides the ground from which eclectics proceeds. He insists, “One must already know the truth in order to recognize it.”⁸⁵ Eclecticism is thus derivative, employing the history of philosophy to confirm truths already verified by other means. Cousin writes in *Fragments philosophiques* itself, “Eclecticism ... is the application of a system: it presupposes a system and begins from a system.”⁸⁶ It occurs after the fact, subject to a prior orientation.

The second option is to take eclecticism beyond its etymological origins by erasing the categories of selection and choice. Historically, this option has been labelled “syncretism”: while the eclectic claims that “to search for truth everywhere is correct, but to find truth everywhere is impossible” for one must “everywhere select the best,”⁸⁷ the syncretic does indeed discover truth *everywhere* indiscriminately. She is indifferent to the merits of what she appropriates. What has hopefully become clear over the course of this essay is that far from being the phantom other of ‘proper’ eclectic practice, such syncretic indifference is an ineluctable moment of all eclectics, especially Cousin’s and Schelling’s;⁸⁸ indeed, if the eclectic system is to be accorded more than a mere post-factum role, such an eclecticism-beyond-eclecticism, an absolute syncretism, needs to be taken seriously.

⁸³ Rey, *Leroux contre Cousin*, 140-1.

⁸⁴ Vermeren, *Victor Cousin*, 25.

⁸⁵ Victor Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* (Paris: Didier, 1867), 14.

⁸⁶ Cousin, *Fragments*, lvi.

⁸⁷ Albrecht, *Eklektik*, 18.

⁸⁸ Schneider (“Eclecticism Rediscovered,” 176) points to the fact that historically the eclectic/syncretic distinction has repeatedly broken down. Similarly, Rey discerns in Cousin’s early writings a promise of indiscriminate eclecticism. Rey, *Leroux contre Cousin*, 140.