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RETRIEVING THE SCHELLINGIAN TRADITION

Friedrich Christoph Oetinger's Speculative Pietism¹

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The influence of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-82) on Schelling's work is even deeper than that exerted by Jakob Boehme, deeper, not because Schelling devoted more scholarly attention to Oetinger than he did to the study of Boehme (he did not), but because Schelling was very likely first introduced to Boehme, theosophy and Protestant mysticism by reading Oetinger.² Both Schelling's

1 A German version of this paper, translated by Uwe Voigt, appeared in the *Comenius Jahrbuch* under the title, "Eine Besinnung auf das Leben im 18. Jahrhundert: Friedrich Christoph Oetingers spekulativer Pietismus," *Comenius Jahrbuch* 25 (2017): 46-61.

2 We touch here on the question of the influence of Western Esotericism, Jewish and Christian Kabbalah, and theosophy on Schelling's development. I have argued that these currents played a major role in the shift in emphasis and the development of the new questions that distinguish the later from the early Schelling, especially the influence of Boehme, Swedenborg, and Baader. See S. J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit* (London: Routledge, 2012), chapter two. In a marked difference from Hegel, the late Schelling speaks of theosophy as a source of knowledge that in principle can exceed philosophy, even if philosophy has every right to try to reconstruct theosophical knowledge on its own terms. See Schelling, SW VIII: 202-5. See also the introduction to Schelling's *Philosophie der Offenbarung* (Schelling, SW XIII: 121-4). On Schelling and speculative pietism see Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 39-68; and in the German literature, Ernst Benz, *Schellings Theologische Geistesahnen* (Wiesbaden: Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, 1955), and Robert Schneider, *Schelling und Hegels Schwäbischen Geistesahnen* (Würzburg: K. Tritsch, 1938). On Schelling and Swedenborg, see Friedemann Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism* (1954), trans. George F. Dole (West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 1997). On Schelling and Boehme see Robert Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the*

father and grandfather were pastors in the Wurtembergian Pietist tradition.³ Schelling most probably first read the works of Oetinger in his father's study as a pre-cautious boy eager to make his way in knowledge both natural and divine. Oetinger's *Biblical Dictionary* (*Biblisches Wörterbuch*), a compendium of theosophy and Biblical theology, was written for lay people as a study guide to the reading of Scripture, but this does not fairly describe it. Concerned as he was with a non-mechanistic philosophy of nature that would be not only consonant with Biblical revelation but also to some degree confirmative of it, Oetinger jammed the encyclopedia with natural scientific and esoteric and occult material one would not expect to find in such a text. It was likely a staple of Schelling's catechetical education. At the age of ten, Schelling received an intense immersion in Oetinger's theosophical pietism, when he was sent to live in Nürtingen while he attended Latin school. He lived for a time in the house of his uncle, who was known as a "fiery disciple of Oetinger's."⁴ Here he met Phillip Matheus Hahn, the most important follower of Oetinger's, who impressed Schelling so deeply that the boy was inspired to compose his first poem on the occasion of the great theologian's death.⁵

Since neither Oetinger nor speculative pietism are widely remembered (despite their massive influence on modern thought via Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin, among others⁶), I will take the opportunity of this first entry in *Kabiri's Retrieving the Schellingian Tradition* to offer an exposition of Oetinger's thought, focusing especially on those aspects of it which were determinative for Schelling's thinking, and traces of which can be found in other Continental philosophers.

Works of 1809-1815 (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1972); and especially, Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999). On Schelling and Oetinger see Wilhelm August Schulze "Oetinger's Beitrag zur Schellingschen Freiheitslehre" *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 54 (1975): 213-225. On Schelling and Kabbalah, see Wilhelm August Schulze, "Schelling und die Kabbala," *Judaica. Beiträge zum Verständnis des Jüdischen Schicksals* 13 (1957): 65-98; 143-70; 210-232. On Schelling and Baader, see Marie-Elise Zovko, *Natur und Gott: Das wirkungsgeschichtliche Verhältnis Schellings und Baaders* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1996).

3 Benz, *Schellings Theologische Geistesansichten*, 41.

4 Schneider, *Schwäbischen Geistesansichten*, 8.

5 Schneider, *Schelling*, 8-9. See Matthews, *Organic Form of Freedom*, 51-2. Schneider and Benz argue that the early Schelling's inspiration in problematizing Fichte's subjectivism with a revamped *Naturphilosophie* was Oetinger's *Lebenstheologie*.

6 Barry Stephenson has exposed the influence of speculative pietism on Herman Hesse in his *Veneration and Revolt: Herman Hesse and Swabian Pietism* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009). It would be interesting to examine the influence of speculative pietism on Heidegger through his reception of Hölderlin. Among other things, this might shed some much needed light on the meaning of the "fourfold," which, whatever else it is, is a binary of two sets of opposites, a dark, contractive set (earth and mortals), and a light, expansive set (sky and immortals), which gives rise to everything that is. See Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993), 43-364.

Life as Master Concept

Oetinger's speculative pietism is a peculiar blend of modern philosophy, Kabbalah, alchemy, and Christian theology. The eclectic blend of sources is held together by Oetinger's one great thought, the notion of *life*.⁷ In Oetinger's view, life is the essence of the Biblical Revelation. The common enemy of theology and philosophy is mechanism, which elevates the lifeless causal interaction of discrete particles—ostensibly a useful if not necessary abstraction for modern physics—into a universal ontological paradigm. Modern natural scientific discoveries, Oetinger argues, need to be interpreted in a bio-theological context that understands the divine, not as a first cause or highest being, but as a self-developing life. The new, non-mechanistic sciences of electricity, magnetism, and chemistry, with their discoveries of how matter is capable of action from distance, exemplify for Oetinger a theological principle, largely forgotten in modernity, but central to Jewish theosophy, Jacob Boehme, and the Renaissance Jewish and Christian kabbalists: life is struggle, a dialectic of conflict and resolution, and only possible through the antagonism and resolution of polarities.

This concept of life grounds Oetinger's critique of representationalism, his theory of embodiment, and his notion of soul, which I will discuss in turn. In the conclusion I will argue that Oetinger's greatest contribution might in fact be to the psychology of the unconscious.

Oetinger describes life in various ways: as spontaneity; self-development; the progressive exteriorization of a hidden interior; and that which contains the ground of its temporal unfolding in itself. The fullness of the concept requires a fusion of both natural science and Biblical theology. In his magnum opus, the 1785 *Theologia ex idea vitae deducta*,⁸ Oetinger argues that revelation and science must be allowed to cross-fertilize each other so that theology can be rethought on the basis of a broadened concept of life. Nature is neither a "clockwork," as the Deists believe, nor a "force," as the mechanists and vitalists would have it, but a self-developing will to revelation. The power of nature is *internal movement*, a manifestation of dynamic principles whose archetypes are found in the dynamic, processive, and ultimately unfathomable life of that which is most living, the revealed God of history. Oetinger rejects the Scholastic ontology for the same reason that he rejects modern mechanistic science: both absolutize extrinsic efficient causality, which leads invariably to the forgetting of the spontaneity characteristic of life. God is not properly described as being, or as a first cause, but as life, whose fundamental telos (like the telos of all living things) is *self-manifestation*. When a flower unfolds from a mature plant, which in turn has unfolded out of sprout and seed, we see in simply form the

7 Sigred Großmann, *Friedrich Christoph Oetingers Gottesvorstellung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 120.

8 Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, *Theologia ex idea vitae deducta*, ed. Konrad Ohly, in two parts, in *Texte zur Geschichte des Pietismus*, Abteil VII, Band 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979).

will to manifestation, which is the essence of all life and the essence of God. If the flowering plant can be said to will something, it wills itself manifest, that is, it opens itself up to light, to others, and ultimately to itself. What is enfolded, hidden, and interior, is unfolded, manifest for all, and externalised. What else is growth? On a macro-cosmic level, this is what is happening in the created order itself. Being is becoming manifest, for its own sake, or without why (as Eckhart put it), unfolding from a hidden, and concentrated core of potencies into a flowering of openly manifest form, pattern and order. Creation is not merely the effect of God's agency; it is a revelation of the life of God, which is nothing other than the absolute archetype of being towards manifestation.⁹ Aristotle, according to Oetinger, is not a reliable guide on these matters; theology like science needs to turn to other sources, ultimately to Biblical revelation of the dynamic and progressively unfolding life of the God in history.

One might think that Aristotle, the biologist, would be the guide in these matters. But for Oetinger, the Aristotelian principle of motion, so fundamental to the theology of the high middle ages—everything that is moved is moved by another—is inadequate to the conceptualization of life, whose law is self-movement. Life is not a causal movement from potency to act, but a dynamic energy that emerges out of a duality of forces, a resolution of struggle between “various forces that are bound together in opposition and conflict.”¹⁰ But Aristotle is not the only obstacle to thinking life in the modern age; Leibniz is singled out by Oetinger, especially the pernicious influence on theology and science of Leibnizian monadology. The monads, in Oetinger's view, are lifeless precisely because they are simple. Life is not complex, dyadic, and relational, not simple and atomistic. Monads express their essence in “windowless” isolation from one another; life, by contrast is a field of intermingling elements, whose relations to one another make possible exchange, movement and growth. The conflicting elements necessary to self-movement are reducible to two opposed principles, one passive and contractive, possessing the capacity to suffer (*Leidensamkeit*), the other active and expansive, possessing the capacity to enflame and affect. The two are drawn to each other even as they repel each other; their polar opposition binds them essentially to each other. Drawing on the theology of electricity of Prokop Divisch, Oetinger describes the polarities as two fires, one cold, the other hot. The first is a “hungry,” centripetal, flammable, attracting force (*die anziehende Kraft*), the systole of life; the second is a centrifugal, enflaming, expansive force (*die wegtreibenden Kraft*), the diastole of life. Nothing is static here, however, and in the explosive transformation of their encounter, the passive and the active turn into each other, the passive assuming the active role, and the passive, the active role. Out of the “flash” (*Blitz*), “shock” (*Schlag*) and *angst* of their conflict, life is born.

9 Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, “Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch,” ed. Gerhard Schäfer, in two parts, in *Texte zur Geschichte des Pietismus*, ed. Gerhard Schäfer, Abteil VII, Band 3 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1999), pt.1: 296.

10 Großmann, *Oetingers Gottesvorstellung*, 124; Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1:217.

The “double fire” (*zweierlei Feuer*) of the conflicting forces reduplicates itself on a new level in the life form produced.¹¹ The two principles converge in the whole as the circumference and centre converge in the production of a circle.¹² The centre opposes the circumference: where the latter radiates outward and strives to expand, the former draws inwards and strives to contract. If the circumference had its way, the circle would become a line; if the centre had its way, the circle would likewise disappear into a point. It is precisely the tension between the two that constitutes the circle as a circle.¹³

Oetinger’s source is clearly Boehme’s notion of God as a living personality containing within himself two opposing forces, the dark and inwardizing drive of wrath, and the light, externalizing drive of mercy. In Boehme’s *ungrund* an eternal will to reveal itself is eternally held in check by an opposing will toward self-concealment. Oetinger is more careful than Boehme to stress the distinction between God as he is in-himself, in whom there is no distinction, no active or passive forces, and the eternal sevenfold nature he generates within himself (the Sephiroth/seven spirits). There is no darkness in God, no potency, no grades or modes of being. God is pure light, without beginning or end. Only in his self-manifestation in the sevenfold nature, the seven spirits or archetypes of created nature (divided as per Boehme into two opposing sets of three, with the “flash” or “crack” [*Blitz*], mediating between

11 Oetinger fuses Newton’s centripetal/centrifugal binary with Boehme’s seven qualities (noting that Newton likely derived his two forces from Boehme). He references William Law and the English Boehmian tradition, suggesting the possibility that Newton’s laws of motion were inspired by theosophy. See Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 285. It is widely known that Newton maintained an active research program in alchemy. See Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader. From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

12 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 218.

13 “Zum Leben gehören verschiedene, in einer gewissen Widrigkeit und Gegeneinander-Wirkung auf einen ordentlichen Zweck hin von Gott zusammenverbundene Kräften. Es befinden sich aber die ursprüngliche Kräften in 2 Gattungen von Körpern. Einige haben die Leidsamkeit und den Hunger, das Feuer an sich zu ziehen; diese sind ohne anhaltendes Reiben wie todt, finster, hart, kalt; die andere haben die feurige webende Kraft der schnellen electrischen Ausdehnung; wenn nun existere durch Reiben erregt und mit der letztern vermengt wird, so wird die Flüchtigkeit gebunden, daß verborgentlich das Active und Passive Feuer in einem innern Streit einander die Wage halten. Daher entsteht bei leichten annähernden Körpern ein motus alternus oder Abwechslung der anziehenden und wegtreibenden Kraft, heißt Systole und Diastole, und ist der Anfang des Lebens, wobei zugleich auch etwas von dem volatile in eine gewisse Weite sich erhebt, doch so, daß sich auch näher gegen dem Centro oder Quelle des Lebens das Active durchs Passivum mit einer Entzündung durchschlägt, ja am nächsten mit mehrer Stärke zur Durchblizung sich vereinigt. Das Active und Passive Feuer treiben einander so schnell, daß im Subjecto selbst die active Elemente zu passive und diese zu active werden, biß bei eine Total-Replication durch Bliz und Schlag entsteht. Es heißt diese Entstehung des durch den Streit geloffenen Feuers und Lichts eine Geburt aus der Angst oder finstern Wolke Ezechielis, und vermittelt solchen Durchbruchs wird ein ausfliessend Saamen-Bild zu einem wachsenden Wesen erhoben, das im Centro seine Wurzel hat und in einer gewissen Peripherie sich ausbreitet. Hier kan man begreifen, daß aus Finsterniß Licht hervor kommt (2. Kor. 4: 6), ja daß die angehäufte gegenseitigen Kräften vermittelt der Elasticität sich plötzlich gegeneinander auflösen, aufheben und abgleichen” (Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 217).

them), does duality and the play or polarity occur. Of God in himself we can say nothing. All we can say is that the revealed God *lets* himself be moved, allows himself to become diversified, self-developing and moving.¹⁴ For Oetinger, by distinction from Boehme, polarity is not grounded in the birth of God from himself but in the birth of the world from God. Thus does Oetinger avoid the historical immanentism, which Boehme, and the middle Schelling fell into, and which was best developed and defined by Hegel, the position that God depends upon the evolution of his creation into self-conscious life to become conscious of himself.¹⁵ Historical immanentism becomes indistinguishable from pantheism in so far as it cannot absolve itself of the error imputed to the latter, the mistake of making the infinite dependent on the finite. Oetinger follows the Kabbalah in distinguishing God's infinity, which is unspeakably simple, the *ein sof* of Isaac of Luria, from God's self-developing life: the latter emerges from the former through an act of self-limitation or contraction (*zimzum*). The most perfect being is not the Scholastic *ens necessarium* that cannot be relate to others or vulnerable to love because it is infinite and free of potency; it is rather the infinite that is free to finitize itself for the sake of love.

God gives rise to plurality within himself, the sevenfold nature of the divine being, which are the archetypes for all movement, multiplicity, and possibility, and which are ordered according to the three persons of the divine Trinity (the Father containing the three dark principles, the Son, the three light principles, and the Spirit mediating the two with the seventh principle). In this tradition, which begins in Boehme and finds its highest point in Schelling's Freedom Essay, God is not so much 'a person' as personalizing. Self-pluralization and self-mediation are therefore conceived as the conditions of personality, beginning with God and repeated in every finite human person. God has posited his non-relational infinity as the past and given rise to relations, first within himself, and then, as a mirror of his internal community, without himself. He does it for the sake of love, which is not possible where relations do not exist.¹⁶

In creation the binary of dark and light, wrath and mercy, Father and Son, first manifest in the sevenfold nature of the unfolded divine, becomes materialized in the opposites of contraction and expansion, which are the basic principle of nature. These two further bifurcate into earth, air, fire and water, each of which incarnates the duality in a different way (earth and water on the

14 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 287; Gorßmann, *Oetingers Gottesvorstellung*, 130-143.

15 On historical immanentism, see McGrath, *Dark Ground*, chapter one.

16 "But the non-ground divides itself into the two exactly equal beginnings, only so that the two, which could not exist simultaneously or be one in it as the non-ground, become one through love, that is, it divides itself only so that there may be life and love and personal existence. For love is neither in indifference nor where opposites are linked which require linkage for [their] Being, but rather (to repeat a phrase which has already been said) this is the secret of love, that it links such things of which each could exist for itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other" (SW VII: 500). English: F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press. 2006), 70.

dark, contractive side, air and water on the light expansive side).¹⁷ Although the two principles, dark and light, wrath and mercy, contraction and expansion, are never found without each other, one is metaphysically prior to the other in the created order.¹⁸ What is most original in nature is the passive or dark principle. In the depths of nature lies an unformed sea of potency, what the alchemists call *prima materia*. The darkness however is implicit light, potential structure and form. God draws the light *out of* the darkness.¹⁹ At the origin of every creature, then, is formlessness or chaos: “Every creature is first made chaotically, then regulated and formed in light, finally in end and measure made into an embodied organic form.”²⁰ The first manifestation of God in creation is not form but matter, not order but chaos; out of the chaos appears the primordial play of forms, the equilibrium of forces that gives rise to life.²¹ The play of polarities makes creation into an inexhaustibly creative, self-generative order. The ever-revolving “wheel of birth” emerges from the tension between “the passive and the active principles.”²² Out of the strife of opposites in nature emerges life’s basic drive (*der Umtrieb des Lebens*): toward the exteriorization of the interior or self-manifestation.²³

Oetinger criticizes the Aristotelian/Leibnizian logical principles of identity and sufficient reason for engendering mechanistic and externalistic approaches to truth. The principle of identity, which assumes that being is self-identical, deals only with static and unchanging entities, not with self-developing, growing, and ever-changing life. As Hegel went on to argue, the living thing is never simply identical with itself: it is always othering itself, i.e., moving.²⁴ The principle of sufficient reason likewise substitutes a static entity for the living and self-developing being. The deduction of an efficient cause assumes that the thing lacks a ground of its activity within itself; the thing becomes on this view a mechanism which is always determined by something outside itself, i.e., without a life of its own. Both principles miss the self-activity

17 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 287.

18 Schelling will make the dark principle prior to the light principle, not only in creation but also in God. The ground of God is the dark womb of potency in which God “comes to be.” See Schelling, SW VII: 356-36. Oetinger does not make this heterodox move, but distinguishes the order of principles in nature from the structure of the divine. In his depths there is no nature in God, no polarity or play of action/reaction. God freely takes on a nature for the sake of his self-manifestation. See Oetinger, *Biblische und Emblematisches Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 287.

19 Gen. 1: 2-3; Schneider, *Schelling*, 93.

20 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 70. Cf. Schelling, SW VII: 345-347; *Freedom*, 42-43.

21 Schneider, *Schelling*, 97.

22 Schneider, *Schelling*, 102.

23 See Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 264: “Nun gehören zum Leben verschiedene in einer gewissen Contrariété des Activi und Passivi, oder in einer gewissen Gegeneinander-Wirkung auf einen ordentlichen zweck zusammen verbundene Kräften. Der einzige gottselige Newton hat unter den Weltweisen eingesehen, daß zwei widerwärtige central-Kräften der Anfang des Rades der Geburt seien, woraus der Umlauf der Dinge entsteht.”

24 G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1969), 440.

so essential to understanding life. The focus for Oetinger is not the external cause conditioning the thing, but rather the essence of the thing, from out of which the thing becomes, like the sprout from the seed.²⁵ Life is change and movement not self-identity.²⁶

A Non-Representational Theory of Knowledge

If on the metaphysical side Oetinger's nemesis is mechanistic reductionism, on the philosophical side, he struggles against its epistemological analogue: representationalism. Long before Hegel became famous for the claim, Oetinger argues that the truth is never one-sided or partial, and therefore, never reducible to a proposition; rather truth is the whole, which exceeds any propositional expression.²⁷ Oetinger's "sacred philosophy" (*sacra philosophia*) fuses the study of history with the study of nature, the study of theology with philosophy and science, in an inevitably imperfect effort to give as comprehensive an account of infinite reality (the self-manifestation of God) as is humanly possible. Just as according to the Kabbalah no passage of scripture can be understood apart from the whole vision revealed therein, so too God's actions in history cannot be properly understood apart from his revelation in the whole of nature. In an anticipation of Hegel's absolute idealism, Oetinger opposes the epistemological standpoint of modern philosophy—the Cartesian/Kantian stipulation that science and metaphysics must be preceded by a critique of the conditions of the possibility of knowledge—with the proto-Schelling/Hegelian assumption that one can begin anywhere.²⁸ Theories of mind that interpolate a representation between intellect and thing dichotomize truth and reality. The truth is not a representation or a correspondence between a representation and a thing; for Oetinger, as much as for Hegel, the truth is the real, and the real the truth. Oetinger focuses on the literal meaning of the Greek *Altheia* to highlight the non-representational nature of truth. Truth does not consist primarily in image or concept but in a revelation of being.²⁹

Representationalism assumes that human being is initially outside the truth, confined to a subjective world, from which he or she reaches out toward reality-in-itself. The model fails to recognize that the soul leans towards the real the way the plant leans towards the sun. Human being has a natural instinct for

25 Schneider, *Schelling*, 79.

26 In Oetinger's *Wörterbuch* "Seyn" is interpreted as a derivative term, whose first meaning is "life." Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 296. Cf. Schelling, SW VII: 349-51. "Will is primal Being to which alone all predicates of Being apply."

27 Schneider, *Schelling*, 51.

28 Schneider, *Schelling*, 53.

29 See Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 351: "Truth is in concept, when our concepts are the things themselves [*Sache selbst*].... Truth is something ontological [*wesentliches*], consisting not only in thought, image, and word, but in being [*wesen*]. When being subsists in the truth, the relationship of the part to the whole comes clearly to the fore."

the real, a feeling for the truth, which is the common possession of all people, a *sensus communis*, a non-deductive, non-demonstrable immediate knowledge which lies at the basis of human consciousness.³⁰ The *sensus communis* is a residue of our original unity with God, a natural revelation, for the most part lost but not wholly destroyed in the fall. Oetinger describes it as an “immediate interpenetration of the innermost being of spirit with the essence of all beings [*grund-Wesen aller Wesen*], the self-sufficient truth.”³¹ The *sensus communis* exceeds the powers of understanding and penetrates to the essence of life itself. It is not the innate ideas of modern philosophy, not a content, but a *feeling* for the whole, which must be supported, developed and elaborated through the discursive practices of science. Oetinger’s view that our inborn feeling for the whole must be elaborated by discursive reasoning parallels the early Schelling’s approach to intellectual intuition. The *sensus communis* is the primordial, pre-conceptual, non-discursive sense for the whole of reality, which sets the soul in motion. The whole is always vaguely known prior to the part; the path of knowledge passes from an inchoate intuitive fore-grasp of the whole, through a discursive understanding of the parts, only to reconstruct the whole from the parts—Gadamer’s hermeneutical circle. This path is not the geometric method of modern metaphysics but a more organic movement, which Oetinger calls the *ordo generativus*, knowledge blossoming from within outward, like the plant from the seed.³² It is a finalistic movement, akin to the freedom with which a person reveals his or herself in action, rather than a deduction, in accordance with Oetinger’s basic presupposition: that life is the primary reference point for being and knowing. Knowledge, as the highest expression of life, could never be a passive representing; it is rather the coordination of drive (*Trieb*), desire (*Begierde*) and longing (*Lust*). Hence knowledge reaches its highest expression in love.³³

On the Body and its Soul

Perhaps no theologian in the history of Christian theology has so emphatically resisted the spirit-matter dichotomy, which routinely haunts Western thought, as Oetinger. For Oetinger, any philosophy or theology that denigrates the body, or makes it a means to a spiritual end (as Augustine could be said to have done), is to be rejected. “Embodiment is the end of all God’s work [*Leiblichkeit ist das*

30 Hans-Georg Gadamer draws on Oetinger in his development of common sense in philosophical hermeneutics. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

31 Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, *Sämtlichen Schriften*, ed. Karl Christian Eberhard Ehmann, Zweiter Abteilung, Theosophische Schriften, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: J.F. Steinkopf, Facsimile of the 1776 edition), vol. 5: 291.

32 Schneider, *Schelling*, 72.

33 Schneider, *Schelling*, 85.

Ende der Werke Gottes].”³⁴ Heaven and earth constitute the macrocosm, which reveals the glory of God. The organic whole of the macrocosm is repeated in “the little world,” the pinnacle and centre of God’s self-revelation, the human being. Drawing freely on Boehme and the Kabbalah, Oetinger re-thinks spirit not as the opposite of body but as its most perfect expression. “Spirit does not exist without body [*Der Geist besteht nicht ohne Leib*].”³⁵ “To be bodily [*leibhaft seyn*] is no imperfection, as commonly believed, but a perfection.”³⁶ The “pleroma” in Oetinger’s revision of Gnosticism is not the spirit- world over and against the material world but the multi-sided fullness of eternal nature, the whole of heaven and earth, with its multitude of bodies, sidereal and material, contained in the image of God. The fullness of being requires the dynamic exchange of opposites, the *enantiodromia* of the passive and the active, the contractive and expansive by which God lives and lets live. The incarnation of Christ is at the centre of this vision; it is not undertaken solely to save the fallen order: the manifestation of God to himself, which sets the absolute in motion, is only fully achieved when God stands forth in time and space, at a particular moment in history, bodily, in Christ. Only when God has thus become absolutely other to himself, finite, embodied, localized in space and time, only then is he fully revealed. Even the heavenly things, the angels and powers that circle the throne, are embodied. Oetinger finds the *Zohar* too other-worldly on this point. Boehme alone seems to have grasped, not just the dignity of the body but its glory. While the tradition has tended to read Boehme as crudely materialistic because he lacks the abstractions necessary to a more sophisticated spiritual vision, Oetinger sees Boehme’s materialism as his great advantage over his predecessors. The sum of Boehme’s vision, in Oetinger’s view, is embodiment: “Everything heavenly, everything invisible, has a form and a figure, like the earthly.”³⁷

It is no surprise then that sin is not a repercussion of embodiment, as it is in many Gnostic and neo-Platonic accounts of redemption. The fall of man in Oetinger’s theology does not consist in the descent into the body, quite the opposite. The fall is the result of a failure to fully embody; it is a symptom of a spiritual rejection of the body. The fallen soul no longer fully commands its body; it is no longer fully or properly embodied. That said, the perfect body is not the flesh and blood of this world but a more perfect but every bit as physical archetype of which this body is an imperfect copy.³⁸ Oetinger draws freely on Hermeticism and Paracelsian alchemy to distinguish a sidereal or ethereal body from the material body. The purpose of this distinction is not to denigrate

34 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 223.

35 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 223.

36 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 131-2.

37 Oetinger, cited in Walter Dierauer, *Hölderlin und der spekulative Pietismus Württembergs: Gemeinsame Anschauungshorizonte im Werk Oetingers und Hölderlins* (Zurich: Juris), 21.

38 This anticipation of receiving a new body after death is the theme of Schelling’s *Clara or, On Nature’s Connection to the Spirit World*, trans. Fiona Steinkamp (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002).

matter but to ennoble it. Matter has greater possibilities than have been realized on earth. In Christ the body is restored to its original dignity, re-spiritualized as it were.³⁹ The soul bears within it an essential relation to its body, a *schema corporeum* and cannot exist without some degree of embodiment. Ultimately its perfection depends on the perfection of its body. “The soul dwells in blood.”⁴⁰ As in the divine life, the goal of all the soul’s striving, self-differentiation and self-seeking is perfect embodiment. “Its end-point or terminus *ad quem* is a pure spiritual-corporeal being (*geist-leiblich reines Wesen*).”

Against neo-Platonism and Leibnizian metaphysics Oetinger posits an essential complexity in the soul. “The soul is no monad, no *punctum indivisibile* ... It is a complex of different forces and essences.”⁴¹ The alchemico-Bohemian principle of polarity in Oetinger is developed into an early psychology of the unconscious. Referencing Mesmer and the proto-psychology of animal magnetism, Oetinger identifies a basic electrical polarity in the body-soul of man, a “double-life.”⁴² The dark principle is the receptive and sensible (*empfindliche*) side of man; the light principle is the active, comprehending and cognizing (*verständliche*) side. The first is passive, animal, and directed “without consciousness” (*hat zwar ohne Bewußtseyn seinem richtigen Gang*); the second is active and spiritual. Both are “electric,” i.e., polarized, oriented dynamically to one another. The sensible soul, *die sinnliche Seele*, is Oetinger’s figure for the unconscious. It stands opposed by the intellectual soul, *die geistliche Seele*. But the opposition here is more complex than the traditional opposition of will and intellect, for both ‘souls’ express will, but in opposed directions. Where the sensible soul is inwardly driven, passively drawing data into itself and thereby

39 Dieurauer, *Hölderlin und der spekulative Pietismus Württembergs*, 20.

40 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 295.

41 “Die Seele ist keine Monade, kein Punctum indivisibile, sondern ein in alles andere wirksam Wesen durch Kraft ihrer zugeordneten Werkzeugen, davon das Leben der Kraft, das Ens penetrabile oder Tinctur das Fürnehmste ist. Sie ist ein Complexus verschiedener Kräften und Essentien, welche im Anfang herb, feurig und flüchtig seyn, und in ihrem Fortgang süß, lieblich, sanft und fix warden. Die Monaden sollen in instant entstehn, aber die Seele entsteht successive. Ihr End-Punkt oder Terminus ad quem ist ein geist-leiblich reines Wesen, sie gehet aus in ein Continuum; daher sagen die Philosophen, die Seele habe ein Schema Corporeum an sich, das ohne Harmonia praestabilita ihr anhangt und zu ihrer Subsistenz gehöre. Von der Seele kan man nichts deutliches verstehen ohne das Ens penetrabile, das sich in alle Gestalten gibt; jedoch ist dies Seele nicht so dünn als das Ens penetrabile der Tinctur. Die Seele wohnt im Blut.” Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 294-5. The term “*ens penetrabile*” (or Tinctur) is taken from Boehme. It is that which quickens and transforms, the “soul of nature” (*anima mundi*), Mercurius in alchemy. It is the animating principle in all things. “Ens penetrabile ist, das ohne etwas zu verlieren, und ohne Division sich ergibt zur Entstehung eines anderen.” Oetinger, cited in Martin Weyer-Menkhoff, *Christus, das Heil der Natur. Entstehung und Systematik der Theologie Friedrich Christoph Oetingers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 192. Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 294. Related to Leibniz’s privileging of simplicity is Leibniz’s other oversight: the forgetting of the essential temporality of the soul. Monads do not develop and so do not need time. The soul, on the other hand, is not ready-made but develops. “The monads develop in an instant, but the soul develops successively.” Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 294.

42 Oetinger *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 218.

asserting its life over and against all else, the intellectual soul is driven outward, towards acts of understanding and love. In the animal the sensible soul develops without consciousness; in the human being the sensible soul subordinates itself to the intellectual soul, consciousness, and thereby serves the whole. But this hierarchical relationship conceals a deeper interdependency: the intellectual soul rests upon the sensible soul, depends upon it as the circle depends upon the centre.⁴³

The “two-souled” human being is described in dynamic and energetic terms: man is drive (*Trieb*), striving (*Streben*), and force (*Kraft*), directed as naturally toward the self-othering, mirroring, and image projection which externalizes and potentizes his essence, as is the sprout toward the seed. Oetinger assents to Boehme’s metaphysical voluntarism in all essential details, bringing to the discussion of “will” his superior knowledge of Scholastic psychology. He distinguishes sensing, understanding, and willing, but refuses to separate them as faculties. These are not “purely spiritual” in the sense of having no analogue in nature: rather they are potentizations of the three basic forces of nature, which Oetinger defines as receiving (sensing), expansion (understanding), and contraction (willing). But it is not from observing nature that we understand the human being; it is from observing the human being that we understand nature.⁴⁴ The human being is not a thing, neither a substance in the Aristotelian sense of a self-identical entity which supports a set of changing attributes, nor a knowing subject in the Cartesian sense of an irreducible thinking thing which represents the external world to itself, but a self-moving will that naturally seeks to differentiate itself, to experience itself by encountering others like itself. As the apotheosis of created life, imaging the life of the creator of all, the human being, with its internal diversity and drive towards relations, is the key to understanding all creatures, from the highest animal to the lowest molecule. This in anticipation of Schelling Oetinger sharply rejects the modern philosophical tendency to dichotomize freedom, characteristic of human spirit, and nature, compelled by necessity.⁴⁵ The former is not an immaterial order of disembodied spiritual volition (as in Kant); nor is the latter a spiritless order of mechanistic causality (as in Spinoza). Rather, human freedom expresses the spontaneity of movement characteristic of all life. All life prefigures the dynamic of self-conscious freedom, the capacity to ascent to natural development, to *choose* light and order (development) or darkness and chaos (regression).⁴⁶ Everything living figures freedom; the will that freely choose its

43 “Das Psychische oder Seelische seye das erste, das Geistliche das zweite ...” Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 219.

44 Schneider, *Schelling*, 130. Man, the pinnacle of creation, the microcosm, is “the point of concentration of all forces in the world.” Oetinger cited in Dierauer, “Hölderlin und der spekulative Pietismus Württembergs,” 30. “Everything corresponds to man” (Alles bezieht sich auf den Menschen).” Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1: 234. The doctrine of the microcosm is of course a leitmotif of the Western esoteric tradition from Kabbalah to Baader.

45 Schneider, *Schelling*, 121.

46 Schneider, *Schelling*, 119.

own development, simplifies and unifies the conflicting forces within itself and becomes itself out of one's own essence. Human being seeks to "other" itself, to differentiate the entangled and conflicting forces within itself, and, imitating God, to give expression to a unified image of itself. Human being, however, is fallen, and cannot achieve this end without grace. True freedom only appears in the grace-ennobled human being. But what appears in the Christ-man or woman is what nature struggles to give expression to, even in its lowliest forms.

These are all strikingly Schellingian themes, at least for any reader with more than a cursory knowledge of the middle Schelling. Oetinger even prefigures Schelling's reworking of the Kantian doctrine of the intelligible act. Schelling resolves the Kantian-Fichtian dichotomy between the spontaneity of the morally culpable act and the causal necessity of every natural event by holding human activity to be pre-determined by the will itself in an intelligible act, a pure noumenal, trans-temporal and non-spatial decision, by which the soul authors itself. Everything that the soul does in the course of historical life is pre-determined by this original, spontaneous election of character. The Freedom Essay is therefore neither deterministic nor libertarian; it advances as an alternative to both of these a doctrine of self-determination, or better, since it occurs once and for all, and is not compatible with libertarian freedom of choice, a doctrine of determination by the self. The human is thus both determined in time and the absolutely free author of his or herself.⁴⁷

One hundred years before Schelling, and drawing on similar Boehmian texts as Schelling, Oetinger defines the human as a will to self-manifestation. Imaging the living and self-manifesting God, whom Boehme holds to "have given birth to himself" in an act of decision that ends the eternal nothingness of the simple infinite and divides the Godhead into a dark-ground and the image which it generates of itself, the human longs to become something for itself: its freedom does not hover in indecision but resolves itself in an act that generates an image. The image, however, is not merely a reflection of an already existent being: rather it is a projection of possibility. It is absolutely crucial to Boehme's doctrine of the mirror of wisdom and Oetinger's psychology to distinguish the ground from the image projected by the ground. In this image, the human beholds itself as it might be. Its image becomes a destiny: the character which then determines its actions.⁴⁸ Borrowing Swedenborg's term, Oetinger calls this the "essentification" of the soul: the soul does not simply double itself in the mirror; it becomes, in its image, more intensely and actually itself; to use Schellingian language, it potentizes its powers in a determinate, concrete, and actual manifestation of its essence. The mirroring is not merely a doubling because the soul only really comes to be itself in its image. Only in self-othering is there a self at all. This peculiar structure is repeated in Lacan's mirror stage,

47 See Schelling SW VII: 382-84; *Freedom*, 49-51.

48 Schneider, *Schelling*, 121-122.

likely under the influence of Boehme.⁴⁹ A decisive difference between Oetinger and Lacan, however, is that Oetinger does not devalue consciousness on this basis. He does not hold, as Lacan does, that the soul is hereby shown to be virtual, a pseudo-identity masking a lack of being. On the contrary, the soul is not alienated from itself in its image; rather it comes to itself for the first time, as the first person of the Trinity is not alienated in begetting of the Son. Related to this point is the striking concept of desire in desire in Oetinger, desire which is no longer merely privative but productive. In this, Oetinger anticipates Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of desire, which was constructed as an alternative to Lacanian constitutive lack.⁵⁰ For Oetinger the will's search for another is not to be interpreted negatively, as though the will begins in a state of lack: the desire of the will is creative: it is not motivated by lack but by the urge to express, to reveal, to let there be more being. Oetinger compares the essentification of the soul to the alchemical *transmutio*: a chaotic and undifferentiated vortex of conflicting forces achieves a new state of unification through a process of separation (*solve*) and recombination (*coagula*).⁵¹ The task of the human, as high priest of creation, is to raise matter into spirit in this axial decision to become *someone*.⁵²

Oetinger's anthropology is synthesized in a dense entry on "the will" in his *Biblical and Emblematic Dictionary* (*Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch*). Anyone familiar with Schelling's Freedom Essay will immediately see the profound similarities between Oetinger's theosophical vision of the human being as an equilibrium of forces and Schelling's mature conception of human freedom.

No one comprehends what power God has invested in the will. It is also very difficult to explain what the will is. It is disputed among scholars whether the will precedes understanding, or whether the understanding precedes the will, nonetheless the soul is at once willing and understanding. One cannot definitely distinguish what is prior and what is secondary.... Without the differentiation of forces in the soul, the creature could not have been granted any self-movement, for the two conflicting central-forces, which Newton recognizes in creation

49 See Dany-Robert Dufour, *Lacan et le miroir sophianique de Boehme* (Paris: Cahiers de l'Unebévue, 1998).

50 On essentification (also a Swedenborgian theme), see Horn, Swedenborg, 58; Schelling, *Clara*, 237; "Death is therefore not an absolute separation of the spirit from the body, but only a separation from that element of the body that is in opposition to the spirit ... of the good from the evil, then, of the evil from the good. This means that it is not just part of the person that is immortal, but rather the whole person in regard to the true essence—death is a reduction to the essential [*reduction ad essentiam*]."

51 See "Solve et Coagula" in Lynda Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

52 Schneider, *Schelling*, 129.

[attraction/repulsion], are the ground of self-movement. Out of this ground of his freedom God has imparted these two conflicting forces to the creature; the creature is not eternal, but has a beginning and an end. The inexhaustible accidentality or contingency of the creature has a true ground in freedom, although self-movement receives its character of freedom from God. Therefore pantheism or Spinozism is cut off at its roots. Through self-movement a thing changes its state out of itself without movement from another, and this self-active force is the will in the soul, the self-drive in the body.⁵³

Several things are worth noting in this remarkable text. First we see Oetinger's refusal to weigh in on one side of the voluntarist debate or the other. The soul's capacity for knowledge is only fully understood in the context of its drive to manifest itself. Prior to all acts of cognition is the basic life-drive (*Trieb*) toward self-manifestation, exfoliation of inner power, the kernel of self-movement, which makes the soul lively, not merely a being or a thing. Secondly, movement is only possible if the soul is originally divided. A self-identical being that excludes all difference within itself cannot move. Third, Oetinger expressly develops this anthropology as an alternative to Spinozistic determinism, with a view to naturalizing freedom without collapsing spirit into matter.

The second half of Oetinger's entry on will describes the theosophical prototype of what comes to be known as the "mirror stage" in Lacanian psychoanalysis:

When the will moves within itself, through the differentiation of the entangled forces [*in einander laufenden Kräften*], it draws an image of itself out of its hiddenness; it becomes a mirror for itself, in which the darkness fades away. It is not only self-knowledge that develops but a power to reveal oneself to oneself and to others in clear concepts drawn from darkness, the power to distinguish oneself, to compare oneself and to understand oneself. This cannot happen without a simplification of the eternal word in the soul. With this simplification, multiple forces can be balanced in a complex activity [*Bei diesem kan stehen eine Ineinander-Wirkung vieler Kräften*] ... this occurs through the nearness and interpenetration of the eternal word [*die Beiheit und Durchdringung des ewigen Worts*].⁵⁴

53 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1, 355-6.

54 Oetinger, *Wörterbuch*, pt. 1:356. "Wenn der Wille in sich selber geht, so bringt er aus seiner Verborgenheit das Bild seiner selbst durch Vervielfältigung der in einander laufenden Kräften hervor, er wird sich selbst zu einem Spiegel, in welchem die Finsternis vergeht. Es entsteht nicht nur eine Selbst-Erkänntniß, sondern es warden aus dunklen klare Begriffe, auf dies Art entsteht die Kraft zu unterscheiden, und aus dieser die Kraft zu vergleichen, sich selbst zu verstehen,

The internal movement of the will is a differentiation of undifferentiated or entangled opposites—the *solve* of alchemy. The telos and product of the movement is the projection of an image, not merely a repetition of what the soul was prior to the differentiation that produced the image, but an idealization, a unification of what was divided, a synthesis and balancing of what is inherently conflictual. The mirroring is not self-knowledge in a Cartesian subjectivistic sense; it has a profoundly ontological telos: it is a revelation of the self, to itself and to others outside of it; thus a positing of otherness (if we can use this Fichtian language in this context), an acknowledgement of others, which is, in its first movement, a letting otherness be. Out of this idealization, the soul becomes distinct from others—its internal diversity comes together in a new way, producing a life in its own right (*coagula/transmutio*). The unity of the soul in Oetinger’s alchemico-theosophical vision, is not given, but achieved, a simplification of what was originally complex, made possible by “the eternal word,” God’s first image of himself, which is imaged again in the soul that images itself.

The Dawn of a New Psychology

The metaphysical repercussions of Oetinger’s speculative theology of life are immense. Oetinger overturns basic presuppositions of the eighteenth-century philosophy—the representationalist theory of knowledge, the de-valuation of the body, and the mechanistic model of matter. Oetinger’s most significant contribution, however, is to the theory of the unconscious, which is born in this century, and first becomes a medical hypothesis in the next. Through Schelling, Oetinger’s model of the doubled soul becomes the central source for the nineteenth-century theories of the unconscious that set the stage for the rise of psychoanalysis. In conclusion, I will sketch out some of the connections between Oetinger’s anthropology and the psychology of the unconscious.

The principle of polarity, essential to Oetinger’s concept of life, means there must be a ‘night’ side to the soul. There are no simples in nature according to Oetinger. Atomism is a philosophy of the non-living. The assumption of external causality misses the phenomenon of life entirely. Life is not a pre-given unity that suffers changes over time, but an emergent unity, a hard-won equilibrium of conflicting powers. In another configuration, the strife between these opposites does not lead to growth or development but to decay and death. The psychological counterpart to atomism is the neo-Platonic notion of the simplicity of the soul. Since Plato’s *Phaedo*, various arguments have been made

über sich selbst zu denken, kurz eine Kraft sich gegen sich und andere zu offenbaren. Diß kan nicht geschehen ohne Simplification des ewigen Worts in der Seele. Diese simplificiert, was irgend material kan degacht warden. Diese bringt Einheit in die Seele. Bei diesem kan stehen eine Ineinander Wirkung vieler Kräften.”

attempting to prove the immortality of the soul on the grounds that, because death is decomposition, and only composites can die, the soul, which lacks composition, must be immortal. The assumption in the neo-Platonic tradition is that the soul is immaterial, non-composite and self-subsistent. From this anthropology, the notion of the unconscious could not develop.⁵⁵ A simple soul has no *essentially* unconscious side. It might have degrees of awareness just as it has degrees of moral purity. It might struggle with ignorance, with a heart whose reasons escape it, with passions that overwhelm its ratiocinative powers. It might suffer temptations and disintegrations into multiplicity. But all of this internal division is consequent to the unity of the soul, a degeneration and fall from its essence, not the condition of its emergence into unity. Darkness, passion, desire in neo-Platonic anthropology are understood not as intrinsic to the life of the soul but as symptoms of its loss of unity with the good and fall into embodiment.

As we have seen, Oetinger develops the notion of self-knowledge as mirroring out of Boehme's doctrine of "the mirror of wisdom" and prepares the ground for later psychoanalytical notions of the role of "the ego ideal" in the constitution of personality. Soul-making for Oetinger must be a doubling, a drive towards self-manifestation that fashions an image of itself so that it might know itself. The paradigm is the self-developing and personalizing God, who generates the mirror of his wisdom so that he might be self-manifest. Just so, the created will wills another to itself within which it can behold itself. But what the will beholds in the mirror is not merely a repetition of that which preceded the mirroring: it is rather a new kind of life within the will, a negation of primary narcissism, a release toward the other, which engenders the soul's relations to reality. The image stands to the will as final cause: that is, the will gives to itself its final cause, creates for itself its own destiny, which determines all its subsequent decisions. Thus is the will absolutely free. Oetinger's speculative theology of life thus offers us a rare alternative to the all-too-common denigration of the body and the tyranny of the other-worldly in the history of Western philosophy and theology. Oetinger produces a non-dualistic theology of embodiment without minimizing the disruptive nature of evil. The body is no longer an obstacle to holiness but the end of all spiritual development. Health now takes on a new significance: to be healthy in body is to have the physical analogue of a holy soul. In the union of physical and spiritual health, the human as the microcosm images the universe as it was meant to be. Oetinger's search for a non-Cartesian anthropology anticipates later developments in the psychology of the unconscious (Carus, Fechner, von Hartmann, early Freud), which are each in their own way concerned with the effort to rethink the body-soul relation, no longer in terms of an ontological

⁵⁵ It is for this reason that I have argued that the unconscious is essentially a modern thought, and cannot be grafted onto ancient theories of the irrational. See McGrath, *Dark Ground*, chapter one.

opposition but as two sides of a living whole. If the human being is truly alive there must be something bodily about the soul and something soul-like about the body.