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The Philosophical Significance of Schelling's Plato Notebooks (1792–1794)¹

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Prior to getting swept up into the new philosophy, Schelling was immersed in the old. Until the final year of his formal education at Tübingen, Schelling was engaged in classical philosophical and theological studies.² He wrote commentaries on several biblical texts, wrote and published a treatise on myth, and spent time engaging with Plato's dialogues and Platonism, especially insofar as Platonism affected the Biblical texts and the development of Christian doctrine.³ The importance of these aspects of

¹ All Schelling references are to Schelling, *Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976; cited as AA) and—if the work appears there—Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1856-1861; cited as SW). All translations are mine; references to my translation of the notebooks are cited in footnotes. I am grateful to Jeffrey J. Fisher and Christopher Sator for their feedback on a version of this essay.

² Schelling had been exposed to Kant and Reinhold early on; he writes his 1792 *specimina* for his philosophy degree on issues in Kantian theoretical and practical reason. The two *specimina*, titled *Über die Möglichkeit einer Philosophie ohne Beinamen, nebst einigen Bemerkungen über die Reinholdische Elementarphilosophie* and *Über die Übereinstimmung der Kritik der theoretischen und praktischen Vernunft, besonders in Bezug auf den Gebrauch der Kategorien, und der Realisierung der Idee einer intelligiblen Welt durch ein Factum in der letzteren*, are unfortunately lost; we only have their titles. See W. G. Jacobs, *Zwischen Revolution und Orthodoxie: Schelling und seine Freunde im Stift und an der Universität Tübingen. Texte und Untersuchungen*. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1989), 72. Schelling also refers to Kant's third *Critique* in his 1794 *Timaeus*-commentary. But he only really abandons his studies in scripture, hermeneutics, and classics and devotes himself to the new philosophy after meeting Fichte in May of 1794. In early 1795, Schelling writes to Hegel, who has asked him about his studies, "Who would remain buried in the dust of antiquity when the course of his *own* time sweeps him up and away with every moment?" (AA III/1:16).

³ Schelling would have been familiar with the work and likely attended the lectures of Christian Friedrich Röbler, a historian on the faculty and rector at Tübingen. Röbler had published a ten-volume series of translations of excerpts of the Church fathers, and who was himself steeped in Platonism, especially

Schelling's intellectual heritage is beginning to be recognized, especially for Schelling's late philosophy, when he returns to themes of mythology and revelation.⁴ Accordingly, we can take as a working hypothesis that this early formation in the classical philosophical and theological traditions with an emphasis on the divine is important to Schelling's overarching philosophical orientation and development. While many of the authors and themes that Schelling engaged with at this time are no longer well-known to contemporary scholars, his engagement with Plato can offer a useful window into his philosophical orientation at that time. His notes and texts on Plato resonate in striking ways with his subsequent philosophical work, particularly in his commitment to a higher capacity in the human being which enables access to something which cannot be rendered in conceptual or discursive form.

Many of Schelling's notebooks and lectures survive and are currently being disseminated in critical editions and translations. His extant early notebooks have recently been published in the *Nachlass* editions of the *Historical-Critical Edition* (*Historische-Kritische Ausgabe*) of his work (AA Reihe II). Portions of these notebooks offer a window into Schelling's engagement with Plato during his time as a student at the Tübinger Stift. These appeared in AA II/4 in 2013 as "Types of Representation of the Ancient World" ("*Vorstellungsarten der alten Welt*," dated 1792) and in AA II/5 in 2016 as "On the Spirit of the Platonic Philosophy" ("*Über den Geist der platonischen Philosophie*") and the attached *Timaeus*-commentary (dated 1794, and likely completed in the early months of that year). This latter work is the most substantial and sustained of these portions of the notebooks. In this work, Schelling combines the creation myth of the *Timaeus* and the four principles of being put forth in Plato's *Philebus* with elements of Kant's Critical philosophy. This commentary has been independently available since 1994 in a stand-alone volume and has been available in English since the 2008 translation published in *Epoché*.⁵ A transcription and commentary on the other two portions of the notebook have been available in Michael Franz's dissertation, published in 1996 as *Schelling's Tübingen Plato Studies* (*Schellings Tübinger Platon-Studien*). As a result, Schelling's engagement with Plato is now becoming more widely known, and several important works have addressed the *Timaeus*-commentary

middle Platonism. See Michael Franz, *Tübinger Platonismus: Die gemeinsamen philosophischen Anfangsgründe von Hölderlin, Schelling, und Hegel* (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2012), 61–71, where he argues that Rößler was a significant influence on Hölderlin, Schelling, and Hegel.

⁴ See, for example, recent work by Sean McGrath, including *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: the Turn to the Positive* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021); Chelsea Harry, "Schelling and Plato" in *Palgrave Schelling Handbook*, ed. Sean McGrath, Kyla Bruff, and Joseph Carew (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming), especially her sections on the role of recollection in *Ages of the World*, and how Schelling in his Berlin lectures portrays myth as sublating both the material and the spiritual, pointing toward a primordial unity.

⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *Timaeus* (1794), ed. Hartmut Buchner (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog Verlag 1994); "Timaeus (1794)," trans. Adam Arola, Jena Jolissaint, and Peter Warnek, *Epoché* 12, no. 2 (2008): 205–248.

and its significance for Schelling's philosophy, particularly in his philosophy of nature.⁶

In light of growing interest in Schelling's early engagement with Plato, I have translated these two shorter portions of the Plato notebooks into English. The translation appears in *Epoché* as "Schelling's Plato Notebooks, 1792–1794."⁷ What we find in these pages is not a philosophical treatise, and so in this way these portions of the notebooks are quite unlike the *Timaeus*-commentary. In these two sections, Schelling moves back and forth between German translations of the Greek, unfinished notes, and prose reflections. Nevertheless, these less sustained treatments of Plato offer a more complete picture of which dialogues Schelling was engaged with in his time as a student, his thematic focus, and what he garnered from these works. While the *Timaeus* and *Philebus* are addressed in these pages, we also see Schelling engaging with other dialogues and Platonic themes that are not addressed in the *Timaeus*-commentary.

In this essay I present aspects of the philosophical significance of these portions of the notebooks, briefly noting the various echoes of Plato's influence in Schelling's subsequent philosophical work. I treat the themes and corresponding dialogues in turn: First, I discuss divine dispensation, genius, and the fate of these notions in what Schelling later terms intellectual intuition. The crucial dialogues for Schelling here are the *Ion* and *Meno*. Second, I turn to the person of Socrates and the nature of philosophy. Here, the crucial dialogues are the *Theaetetus* and the *Theages*. I conclude with a brief précis of potential further avenues for exploring these notebooks.

⁶ Hermann Krings ("Genesis und Materie – Zur Bedeutung der *Timaeus*-Handschrift für Schellings Naturphilosophie," in *Timaeus (1794)*) offers an explication primarily in terms of the philosophy of nature. Manfred Baum ("The Beginnings of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature," in *The Reception of Kant's Critical Philosophy in German Idealism*, ed. Sally Sedgwick [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000] 199–215), gives a helpful reading in terms of the context of *Timaeus* interpretation at the time. Werner Beierwaltes ("Plato's *Timaeus* in German Idealism: Schelling and Windischmann" in *Plato's Timaeus as Cultural Icon*, ed. Gretchen Reydam-Schils [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003], 267–289), takes issue with the narrowness of the focus on Schelling's philosophy of nature in previous literature and gives an interpretation of the commentary as relevant to Schelling's broader philosophical concerns. Karin Nisenbaum ("Schelling's Systematization of Kant's Moral Philosophy: Divine Craftsmanship as the Human Moral *Telos*," in *Schellings Freiheitsschrift: Methode, System, Kritik*, ed. Thomas Buchheim, Thomas Frisch, and Nora C. Wachsmann [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021], 467–492) relates the *Timaeus*-commentary to Schelling's early essays, arguing that Schelling offers a much-needed systematization of Kant's philosophy through a morally-inflected interpretation of the creative activity of the demiurge. See also Naomi Fisher and Jeffrey Fisher, "Schelling and the *Philebus*: Limit and the Unlimited in Schelling's Philosophy of Nature," *Epoché* (forthcoming 2022) for an explication of Schelling's account of the four principles of the *Philebus* in relation to the world soul of the *Timaeus*, and how these themes inform interpretation of Schelling's 1798 *On the World Soul* (cf. Schelling, *Von der Weltseele*, AA I/6; SW II: 345–569).

⁷ Naomi Fisher, "Schelling's Plato Notebooks, 1792–1794," *Epoché* 26, no. 1 (2021): 109–131.

From Divine Dispensation to Intellectual Intuition: Schelling's Interpretation of Plato's *Ion*

The portion of the notebooks dated “August 1792” begin with an epigraph from the *Timaeus* (reproduced in the Greek by Schelling): “Wherefore one ought to distinguish two kinds of causes [αἰτίας, *aitias*], the necessary [ἀναγκαῖον, *anankaion*] and the divine, and in all things to seek after the divine for the sake of gaining a life of blessedness” (AA II/4: 15).⁸ This contrast between the necessary, which Schelling aligns with the natural, and the divine informs the following pages. Schelling begins by discussing Plato's *Ion*. This discussion then expands to include various other Platonic dialogues, including the *Meno*, *Apology*, *Philebus*, and *Timaeus*.⁹ One major important feature of this discussion is that Schelling separates out various activities—poetry, divination, prophecy, rhapsody, the development of virtue, and genius more generally—as divine power (θεία δύναμις [*theia dunamis*]) or divine dispensation (θεία μοῖρα [*theia moira*]), and contrasts these kinds of activities with anything that can be developed or learned in a natural way, including through ordinary human cognition. Important features of divine power is that it is a human capacity, it lacks a natural explanation, and it involves connecting things into a unique and singular “harmonious whole.”

This contrast foreshadows and informs Schelling's distinction between intellectual intuition and theoretical philosophy in his early essays and the corresponding distinction between reason and reflection in the early 1800s, as well as subsequent and related contrasts, e.g., positive vs. negative philosophy. The distinction most clearly invokes Plato in Schelling's 1802 dialogue *Bruno*, where this epigraph of the *Timaeus* is given a nod in the subtitle—*On the Divine and Natural Principle of Things*—and this distinction is present in the text as absolute vs. theoretical cognition. Rather than examining the nature of this contrast in Schelling's subsequent works of philosophy, I here offer an exposition of the distinction as it is present in this notebook in order to facilitate comparisons and inform interpretations in future literature.

Schelling quotes extensively from Plato's *Ion*, leaving the quotations fully untranslated, apart from a few German paraphrases. In this short dialogue, Socrates convinces the Homeric rhapsode Ion that the activity of a rhapsode is not a craft (τέχνη [*techné*]), but rather is a divine dispensation, derivative of the divine power of the poet. As the rhapsode is to the poet, so the prophet is to the seer; just as the prophet communicates and explains the insensate divinations of the seer, so the rhapsode both performs and interprets the divinely inspired deliverances of the poet. To demonstrate this relationship to the divine, Socrates uses the image of the lodestone, the magnetic power of which is conducted through iron rings. There is a

⁸ Plato, “*Timaeus*,” trans. W. R. M. Lamb, in *Loeb Classical Library Plato*, vol. 9 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1925), 68e; Schelling, “*Plato Notebooks*,” 110.

⁹ The focus remains on Platonic dialogues throughout AA II/4: 15–25; Schelling, “*Plato Notebooks*,” 110–119.

conduit of divine power from the muse (lodestone), to the poet (first ring), to the rhapsode (middle ring), and finally to the spectator (last ring).¹⁰

After laying out these basic features of the dialogue, Schelling moves on to theorize in his own voice about the nature of divine power.¹¹ Schelling reiterates and endorses the contrast in *Ion* between divine power and natural human knowledge characteristic of a craft. He states:

Characteristic poetic power operates according to laws, of which the poet himself is not distinctly conscious, and which for others are even less cognizable. The product of the poet is in this way a miraculous effect, of which one cannot discover the natural cause. It appears quite suddenly before the eyes of the astonished, who, just as God brought forth the world from chaos, brought it forth from an overflowing abundance of representations and sensations. It is a lightning flash of sensation, of emotional capacities, of the power of thought and combination, with which he ceaselessly awakens new emotions, springs from sensation to sensation, from thought to thought, and connects everything in one harmonious whole. In short, it is an effect for which he himself never sees the complete series of causes and effects, and which the common person cannot think at all. Continue to ask what genius is, says, if I am not mistaken, Rousseau: If you do not yourself possess it, you ask in vain (AA II/4: 18–19).¹²

Poetic power is here identified as a type of genius and as something that lacks a natural explanation. Moreover, we see that Schelling here is thinking of genius in terms of the interconnection of thoughts into a “harmonious whole”. A few pages down, Schelling emphasizes that such a whole is singular: “But above all there are thoughts and feelings of a poet, which one can only say well in a single way” (AA II/4: 22n).¹³ The act of the poet, whereby he compresses his thoughts and feelings into a harmonious whole, is unique; it cannot be done in some other way.

Schelling generalizes this account of poetic genius to all acts of the human understanding: “This power, which is incomprehensible to the common human being, operates in individual human beings not only in the art of poetry—it operates

¹⁰ Plato, “Ion,” trans. W. R. M. Lamb, in *Loeb Classical Library Plato*, vol. 8 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 535e–536d. Some have taken this dialogue to be fully ironic, i.e., Socrates is toying with the rhapsode Ion and takes the activity of the poets, rhapsodes, seers, prophets and so on to be shameful, since these are not crafts and not based on any kind of knowledge. See Rüdiger Bubner, *Innovations of Idealism*, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), specifically 12–13 for a discussion of Goethe’s (and Bubner’s) interpretation of this dialogue as ironic. The young Schelling takes Plato’s Socrates to be in earnest; Bubner takes this to be a clear misreading. However, it is worth noting that Socrates’ invocations of the divine are not frequently ironic, and even if Plato has a low view of contemporaneous poets, his treatment of Homer and Hesiod is not so dismissive. It is at least not obvious that Socrates is being ironic when calling Homer, Hesiod, and their rhapsodes “divine.”

¹¹ See AA II/4: 18–25; Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 114–119 for such theorizing.

¹² Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 114

¹³ Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 116n8.

in each work of human understanding” (AA II/4: 19).¹⁴ The idea here is clearly not that all human cognitive activity is genius, since Schelling indicates that only certain individuals possess it. He means, rather, that each realm of the activity of the understanding admits of genius, including philosophy. Given that Schelling’s later divisions in cognition can best be seen as tracking something like systematic conceptual thought (going under the name of reflection or theoretical cognition) and some extra-systematic intuitive insight (termed variously intellectual intuition, reason, and absolute cognition), this operation of inexplicable divine power or genius in *all* acts of the human understanding warrants further attention.

One can, *prima facie*, consider three competing interpretations of the relationship of this divine power or genius to systematic thought on display in these passages:

- A. Genius *helps* in systematic theorizing. A genius thus has the capacities of an ordinary human being, but to a much higher degree, such that they can engage in theorizing and arrive at insights more quickly and accurately.
- B. Geniuses have insights which are originally inexpressible in terms of the current conceptual system, but that subsequently come to be expressed by that system.
- C. Geniuses have insights that affect the shape or progress of a system, but such insights cannot be incorporated into that system; they are inexpressible not just in terms of the current conceptual system, but in terms of conceptual thought more generally.

Schelling’s account here is clearly not A. He refers to the discussion in *Meno* of whether virtue can be taught: “So he says in *Meno*: virtue cannot be *learned* (thus cannot be effected through *empirical* means or empirically observed in its progress), hence it is a divine gift” (AA II/4: 21).¹⁵ Divine power names something that cannot be effected in an empirical way and thus requires something beyond nature or ordinary empirical means to bring it about. Normal conceptual activities can be improved with training and study and are not merely the purview of a few extraordinary individuals.

Neither is Schelling advancing B. One could cite the following passage defense of B, since here Schelling indicates that genius is involved in finding an elusive sentence that serves as a lynchpin for a system:

What thoughtful mind has not had the experience, after having long grasped for an obscurely hinted sentence, which he always lost again in an enveloping sea of representations as frequently as he sought to hold onto it—often, this

¹⁴ Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 114

¹⁵ Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 115. See Plato, “Meno,” trans. W. R. M. Lamb in *Loeb Classical Library Plato*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 98c–99d.

very sentence would suddenly appear to him bright and distinct and in exact connection with other sentences, after which he was suddenly awoken in that chaos as if by a higher stream of light, the disparate elements divided, the similar flew to one another. ... Here *θεία μοῖρα* [*theia moira, divine dispensation*] appears to have played a role in the first surprise, yet still it was art, but one continually operating in silence, the inborn art of the soul, which had led him there (AA II/4: 19-20).¹⁶

Here one is tempted to take Schelling to mean that genius is in fact insight into that “hinted sentence,” that conceptual formulation which is the keystone of the whole system. But Schelling asserts that there is an art of the soul, in this context, a teachable craft, which is doing the work here. The art leads the person to the precipice, but then a divine dispensation *plays a role* in the newfound formulations. And so it is perhaps a more fitting interpretation of this passage that the genius is struck by an insight via divine dispensation which makes possible a felicitous reorganization of the whole system, but in terms of a sentence which is arrived at and expressed through ordinary human thought. Like genius, the one who does not possess it can never understand it. It is not merely that the insight is one that the non-genius does not *yet* understand because it is not *yet* incorporated into a system, but rather is one that they will never understand because they do not possess it.

The C-interpretation offers a more cohesive account of genius as something that is manifested both in poetry and in conceptual systematic progress. As described by Schelling and explicated above, poetic insight is insight into a singular harmonious whole. A poem is a harmonious whole, and the characteristic gift of the poet is the ability to express in a singular, particular way something that cannot be expressed in conceptual thought or in a general way. If divine power operates in systematic thought in an analogous way, one can treat genius in the context of systematic thought similarly, i.e., as insight into a harmonious whole, which cannot be exhausted by any theoretical, interpretive expressions of it. While interpretations of a poem are expressions of the insight of the poem, such interpretations are always reductive and could never fully capture the poem itself. Similarly, conceptual thought might be the expression of the characteristic insight of a genius, but such insight is never fully captured by that thought. Such insight could nevertheless enable a felicitous reorganization and reorientation of a conceptual system.

This relation between poetry and philosophy is in accord with Schelling’s later comparison between the two in his *Bruno*; this 1802 dialogue invites comparisons to Plato in its form and content. There, Schelling’s character Anselm offers an account of philosophy and poetry as complementary activities, both expressing the highest unity of truth and beauty.¹⁷ The poet is “possessed by” absolute truth and beauty, but

¹⁶ Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 114–115.

¹⁷ See AA I/11: 349-355; SW IV: 226–232. I take it to be clear from the context that Schelling agrees with these particular points made by Anselm, but a defense of this interpretive point is outside the scope of this article.

“least in possession” of it, and therefore expresses in a necessarily *exoteric* way the unity of truth and beauty in their works of poetry, but in a way that is entirely inaccessible to that poet internally. The philosopher, on the other hand, is in possession of the truth and beauty internally but cannot express it externally. Accordingly, philosophy is “necessarily and according to its nature esoteric, and there is no need to maintain secrecy, rather, it is much more secretive through itself” (AA I/11: 355; SW IV: 232). Just as indicated in the discussion in the notebooks, the poet acts as a cognitively unaware conduit for complete, holistic expressions of absolute truth and beauty, and is in this way analogous to the seer, as discussed in *Ion*. The philosopher is analogous to the prophet, as discussed in *Ion*, since she perceives the whole and has a complete internal awareness, but the discursive expression of that which she has access to is always partial, derivative, and inadequate.

In Schelling’s 1802 *Further Presentations*, he refers to Plato explicitly, invoking passages from the *Meno* also discussed in the notebooks in which Socrates claims that virtue is a divine dispensation (θεία μοῖρα [*theia moira*]).¹⁸ He compares intellectual intuition to virtue in its teachability:

One might ask of [intellectual intuition] what Plato asked of virtue: can it be learned or not, is it gained through practice, or perhaps it can be attained neither through instruction nor studiousness, but is rather inborn by nature, or conferred to humans through a divine portion [*göttliches Geschick*]? Clearly it is not something that can be taught. All attempts to teach it are thus completely useless in scientific philosophy (AA I/12: 102-03; SW IV: 361).¹⁹

Here, Schelling’s discussion of intellectual intuition reiterates claims made in the notebooks regarding divine power and genius: that this is something that, like virtue, cannot be taught. Intellectual intuition is the starting point of philosophy; those who do not possess intellectual intuition are thereby remote from philosophy (AA I/12: 103; SW IV: 362). There are strong parallels between intellectual intuition here and divine power and genius in the notebooks. Both refer to something that is irrevocably inaccessible to the one who does not already possess it.

Thus we already see in these early notebooks a defining feature of Schelling’s philosophical orientation, which he finds in Plato, namely: there is an aspect of philosophy that remains always outside the reach of conceptual articulation, that cannot be made exoteric. This is a crucial feature of Schelling’s philosophical perspective throughout his life, and we find the seeds of it here expressed in his reading of Plato.

¹⁸ Plato, “Meno,” 98c–99e, and especially 100b; compare AA II/4: 21; “Plato Notebooks,” 115–116.

¹⁹ Given the resonances of this passage with the 1792 Plato notebooks, it is likely that by *göttliches Geschick* (*divine portion*) Schelling has in mind θεία μοῖρα (*theia moira*), which I have rendered “divine dispensation,” but which, like *Geschick*, also has connotations of fate, portion, or fortune. Schelling’s drawing together “inborn by nature” with “divine portion” also follows Schelling’s claims regarding “natural inspiration” as another way of expressing divine dispensation at AA II/4: 22; Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 116.

Socrates and the Nature of Philosophy

In several sections of the notes from both 1792 and 1794, Schelling discusses the person of Socrates, particularly in relation to the nature of philosophy. He presents Socrates as possessing a divine power in the form of a daimon. Moreover, Socrates is presented as a prophet, since his discussions are expressions of that divine power, and he is guided by that daimon in his philosophical interactions.

Schelling notes many passages in which Socrates refers to his “god” or daimon. On the topic of Socrates’ daimon, Schelling may have been influenced by a 1699 text by the French theologian Matthieu Souverain, and translated by Josias Friedrich Löffler in 1790-1792 as *Essay on the Platonism of the Church Fathers, or Investigation of the Influence of Platonic Philosophy on the Doctrine of the Trinity in the First Century (Versuch über den Platonismus der Kirchenväter, Oder Untersuchung über den Einfluß der Platonischen Philosophie auf die Dreieinigkeitslehre in den ersten Jahrhundert)*.²⁰ Souverain offers an account of Socrates’ frequent appeals to his “god” or daimon as appeals to the rational part of Socrates’ soul by which he participates in the divine. He cites affirmingly other ancient sources which also assert that reason is a kind of daimon.²¹ Schelling similarly treats Socrates’ genius as something internal to him. He differs from Souverain in highlighting the manner in which this power reaches beyond the natural capacities of human beings and is not a *universal* human capacity, but a gift or dispensation reserved for a few. This power is beyond the ordinary discursive capacities of human beings and is expressed in the terms genius and divine power, and is analogous to the characteristic power of seers and poets. Again, one can see how this view of Socrates’ daimon resonates with later central features of Schelling’s philosophy under the concepts of intellectual intuition, reason, true philosophy, and absolute cognition.

On Schelling’s reading, not only does Socrates hear the voice of this daimon, and thus have some kind of conduit to the divine, but he also has the power analogous to that of the rhapsode or prophet, in that he is able to “interpret” those deliverances. Socrates is a prophet, one who interprets and speaks for that which is divine:

The *universal* concept of προφήτης [*prophētēs*, prophet] is with Plato overall this one: *speaker of divinity, interpretes divum*. This is evident e.g. in the passage from the *Philebus* where Protarch says: “καὶ δέομαι γε, ὦ Σώκρατες, αὐτόν σε ἡμῶν

²⁰ Schelling mentions Josias Friedrich Löffler’s translation of this work in some early notes dated to 1793/4 and his 1792 commentary on the letter to the Romans. See AA II/4: 86; AA II/5: 99. The importance of this work can also be seen in Schelling’s other treatments of middle Platonism and his treatment of figures such as Philo of Alexandria and Clement.

²¹ “One need only a little instruction in the allegorical methods of these times in order to understand: with the expressions genius, daimon, heavenly voice, one has meant nothing other than that Socrates, through the power of his own genius and his own reason, which he always consulted, understood this divine voice of nature, which proclaims the creator to us” (Matthieu Souverain, *Versuch über den Platonismus der Kirchenväter, Oder Untersuchung über den Einfluß der Platonischen Philosophie auf die Dreieinigkeitslehre in den ersten Jahrhundert*, trans. Josias Friedrich Löffler (Frommann: Züllichau und Freistadt, 1790–1792), 53.

γενέσθαι προφήτην [*kai deomai ge, o Sōkrates, auton se hēmīn genesthai prophētēn hermēnea ton theon*, and I ask you, Socrates, to be our prophet yourself],” i.e., as one sees from the context ἐρμηνέα τὸν θεόν [*hermēnea ton theon*, interpreter of the god], because earlier Socrates had spoken of “his god” (the daimon which resides in him) (AA II/4: 23).²²

Socrates is thus a prophet because he can interpret the non-discursive deliverances of this “god” or daimon. Asserted throughout the text is a distinction between the inarticulate deliverances of the divine through a seer or poet, on the one hand, and the interpretation of those divine deliverances, on the other. Socrates internally possesses the former and externally performs the latter.

There is still, nevertheless, a disconnect between these capacities. Just as an interpretation of a poem is no substitute for the poem itself, there is something in Socrates’ daimon which cannot be communicated through teaching. The capacity for true philosophy must somehow already exist in a student if it is to be brought to fruition through Socrates’ interaction with that student. This “divine power” is only passed on only to those whom the God favors, i.e., those who also possess this divine power inchoately. In his 1794 notes, Schelling cites passages in the *Theaetetus* and *Theages*, in which Socrates claims that the voice of the daimon warns him that certain people will not benefit from his interaction. The transmission of philosophy from Socrates to his followers is in some way determined by the divine and cannot be controlled or carried out through ordinary teaching. Schelling thus states, “One could not learn philosophy from Socrates, but rather to philosophize” (AA II/5: 142n).²³ And, as Schelling emphasizes, not everyone has the capacity to learn to philosophize, since not everyone has access to the divine power which is essential to that activity.

Again, we here see some of the distinctive elements of Schelling’s philosophical orientation coming through. Schelling is asserting an essential, but esoteric element of philosophical activity. That which truly grounds philosophy is inarticulate and thus nondiscursive, never fully captured in conceptual thought, even while this capacity shapes and guides the formation of conceptual systems. In Schelling’s early notebooks, he describes Plato’s Socrates, the paradigmatic philosopher, in this way. Socrates has internal access to the divine which guides his discussions, though these discussions neither fully express nor transmit that divine element.

²² Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 117.

²³ Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 125n25. A similar view of the transmission of philosophy from teacher to student is presented in Plato’s “Seventh Letter” (see Plato, “Epistle VII,” trans. R. G. Bury in *Loeb Classical Library Plato*, vol. 9 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), especially 341b–344c). While it is unclear if Schelling read this letter directly, Jacobi quotes from this portion of the letter (in Latin) in the 1785 and 1789 editions of his *Spinoza-Letters* (Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* [Breslau: Löwe: 1785], 109–110; 2nd ed. [Breslau: Löwe, 1789], 153–154; *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Moses Mendelssohn in The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni [Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994], 214). Schelling was, of course, quite familiar with this text, and quotes from the 1789 edition in his early essays.

Further Possible Avenues of Exploration

Schelling's reading of Plato should be read in the context of his time; the Platonism of his era is not the same as what we, twenty-first century philosophers, typically refer to as Platonism. We divide Plato's dialogues into early, middle, and late; we focus on the middle dialogues (e.g., the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, and *Meno*) as paradigmatic expressions of Platonism. Our 'Platonism' typically includes two separate realms of being and becoming, the theory of the forms, recollection, the tripartite soul, and so on. The Platonism of Schelling's milieu predates the historical-critical methods of the nineteenth century, and the corresponding dismissal of Neoplatonic readings of Plato. In contrast, Schelling treats the entirety of Plato's corpus, including what we now consider (possibly) apocryphal dialogues, as a unity. This entire corpus is rendered intelligible and cohesive by a framework of interpretation developed throughout the classical tradition, especially in Neoplatonism.

The Platonism of this tradition is a Platonism of a single, highest, generative principle, which cannot be thought by διάνοια (*dianoia*) or discursive rationality.²⁴ This interpretive tradition treats certain dialogues as central; among these central dialogues are those which Schelling studied intensively: the *Philebus* and *Timaeus*.²⁵ Schelling's textual focus and interpretive framework are clearly indebted to this interpretive tradition, but are also informed by the critical care (and sometimes, Enlightenment skepticism) of scholars such as Jakob Brucker, Victor Lebrecht Pleßing, and Dietrich Tiedemann. Many such scholars regard some aspects or figures of the classical tradition—Neoplatonism especially—as metaphysically excessive.²⁶ Schelling writes these notebooks in the context of this transition from classical to historical-critical eras. Schelling's own orientation and proclivities can be clarified through an examination of where he places himself within the old and emergent interpretive traditions.²⁷

²⁴ See, for example, Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. and ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 6.9.6, especially 6.9.6.13-15: "And again when you unify [the One] by discursive thinking [καὶ αὐτὸν ὅταν αὐτὸν ἐνίσῃς τῆι διανοίᾳ, καὶ αὐτὸν ὅταν αὐτὸν ἐνίσῃς τῆι διανοίᾳ], then, too, it is more than you imagine, in being more unified than your thinking of it. For it is in itself, since it has no attributes." For a brief overview of Platonism in this tradition, see Lloyd Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 24–46.

²⁵ Surprisingly, Schelling does not appear to have read the *Parmenides* while at Tübingen, although this is of course another central dialogue for this tradition.

²⁶ See, e.g., Dietrich Tiedemann, *Dialogorum Platonis Argumenta* (Biponti: Ex Typographia Societatis, 1786), 340, where he derides the particularly theological aspects of Proclus and Ficino. Tiedemann is more favorable to Plotinus; see, for instance, Tiedemann, *Geist der Spekulativen Philosophie*, vol. 3 (Marburg: Neuen akademischen Buchhandlungen, 1793), which praises Plotinus, but treats Proclus as falling into theurgic nonsense (519-20).

²⁷ Manfred Baum examines these issues in the *Timaeus*-commentary, framing Schelling's interpretive orientation with respect to Pleßing and Tennemann. See Manfred Baum, "The Beginnings of Schelling's Philosophy of Nature."

Relatedly, some of Schelling's 1792 notebook writings focus on miracle tales, for instance, of Pythagoras and Plato.²⁸ The significance of these stories—for instance, of divine conception—is briefly explained by Schelling:

But certainly the *truth* also in large part grounds [Porphyry's miracle-tales of Pythagoras], and it is much more believable that he wanted to give an example precisely of this history: how from certain *fact* tales could originate, for which that fact provides the ground, but which nevertheless raise that fact far above the truth (AA II/4: 27).²⁹

In his 1794 notebook writings, Schelling expresses the same sentiment about Plato's myths: they express an ahistorical claim historically, because the ahistorical claim is, to some degree, mysterious and paradoxical.³⁰ And so that which cannot be adequately expressed in direct theoretical propositions is expressed in historical fact or fictional tales. The truth of the historical fact is not the point; Schelling seems to be saying that historical truth is sublated by something higher. Aspects of this treatment of myth and history may be relevant in discussions of Schelling's philosophy of art, revelation, and mythology.³¹

These notebooks resonate with much of Schelling's philosophical work and offer a window into Schelling's philosophical orientation just prior to his introduction to Fichte. My hope is that the translated notebooks together with this essay will help to provide a more thorough understanding of the ways in which Schelling's engagement with Plato while at Tübingen informed his work throughout his career.

²⁸ These are recounted at AA II/4: 25–27; “Plato Notebooks” 119–121.

²⁹ Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 121.

³⁰ “Plato wants to express [the connection of the mortal with the immortal in human beings]—but he expresses it *historically* . . . the main claim is just the ahistorical—the mysterious unification of the mortal and immortal, the pure and empirical in human beings” (AA II/5: 138; Schelling, “Plato Notebooks,” 123–124).

³¹ See the final sections of Harry, “Schelling and Plato,” for an exploration of this topic in the context of Schelling's Berlin lectures.