

## RENEWAL AND RETURN TO THE CENTER: SCHELLING, EMERSON, AND NATIVE AMERICAN THOUGHT

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**ABSTRACT:** In a 2004 essay, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology,” Brian Yazzie Burkhart suggests an educational value of the natural world, noting that “the most important things to keep in mind are the simple things that are directly around us in our experience,” and that “truth . . . and meaning and value arise in the intersection between us and all that is around us.” Burkhart offers these insights in an essay dedicated to showing ways in which Native American philosophy differs from Western philosophy. My paper, while maintaining a respect for that difference, approaches the work of two 19th-century Western thinkers—Schelling and Emerson—through a framework suggested by Burkhart and other Native American philosophers. I do so with the aim of bringing to the foreground possibilities for contemporary environmental philosophy.

The central focus of the paper is the educational value of our interactions with nature: the ways in which our self-understanding—and along with it, our moral disposition—might be transformed through our interactions with the natural world. Schelling and Emerson have each been acknowledged for the ways in which their work prefigures contemporary environmentalism, and indigenous American worldviews are recognized for their prospects of rehabilitating our relationship to nature. This paper argues for a renewed sense of self in nature emerging from the contributions of all three.

**KEYWORDS:** Environmental Philosophy; Schelling; Emerson; Native American Philosophy

In his 1989 article, “Schelling: A New Beginning,” Joseph P. Lawrence surveys our present circumstances—“Western science and technology having already transformed the entire globe”—and wonders whether there exist any “viable alternatives to the Western path.” “Renewal must,” Lawrence suggests, “come

from *within* the tradition that has thus dominated” (195). Schelling is, of course, a figure who stands firmly in the Western philosophical tradition; he is also one who has challenged it from within, and thus offered possibilities for thinking in the wake of its dominance.

While I don’t contest Lawrence’s conclusion concerning the possible site for a renewal, I nevertheless appeal here to a philosophical tradition that stands outside of (and often in friction with) the Western one, namely, a Native American philosophical tradition. I do so in hopes that an encounter between works of the Western tradition—specifically, of Schelling and Emerson—and features of Indigenous American thought might productively illuminate Schelling’s philosophy and Emerson’s thought, especially on issues of nature, education, and morality—shining a light on aspects of these works that might guide us in the present toward springs of renewal of human self-understanding and of our ways of being with the natural world.

To this end, I will begin by outlining some features of Native American thought, as articulated by several Native philosophers. In this section, I focus on themes of Native epistemology and ethics, for reasons that will become clear below. This brief review of Native American thought will generate some questions that will be posed to Schelling’s work. I then turn to a focus on Schelling’s work, beginning with his views on nature and education, especially as they are developed in his lectures *On University Studies*. Next, I turn to Emerson, considering the ways in which our self-understanding—and along with it, our moral disposition—might be transformed through our interactions with the natural world. I then return to Schelling, focusing on the later essay *Of Human Freedom*, reading it through the framework of nature and morality. This section will include a discussion of the moral concerns for our relationship to the natural world that begin to emerge for Schelling during this period. Finally, I conclude by raising some questions about what all of this could entail for our contemporary understanding of our relationship to the natural world.

#### A BRIEF SURVEY OF NATIVE AMERICAN EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS

In his essay, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology,” Brian Yazzie Burkhart offers four “principles” guiding a Native American theory of knowledge: the principle of relatedness; the principle of the limits of questioning; the meaning-shaping principle of action; and the

moral universe principle.<sup>1</sup> The first (relatedness) insists that “the most important things to keep in mind are the simple things that are directly around us in our experience.”<sup>2</sup> As I discuss below, this entails that the proper context for the acquisition of knowledge is communal (rather than a pursuit undertaken by an autonomous subject). The second (limits of questioning) tells us that there are things that not only cannot be known, but *should* not be known. Burkhart argues that this approach contrasts starkly with the Western tradition, which insists that more knowledge is always better, and that even the skeptics who recognize limits to possible knowledge do so with melancholic resignation.

A couple of questions quickly arise in response to this “limits of questioning” principle. First, how can we know what things should and should not be known? That is, if there are things we should not inquire into, how can we know what they are without inquiring about them? Second, how can normative limits on the quest for knowledge be warranted? The answer to this second question rests in the third principle, the meaning-shaping principle of action. This principle claims that, “We participate in the meaning-making of the world. There is no world, no truth, without meaning and value, and meaning and value arise in the intersection between us and all that is around us.”<sup>3</sup> Our interactions with the world play a role in constituting the way the world is. Inquiring is a form of doing, and so the ways in which we inquire about the world and what we inquire about determine what there is to discover.

The view that the character of my search for knowledge affects the nature of the world itself gives rise to the fourth principle (moral universe). This one claims that there are no value-free facts, that all knowledge is normative. This suggests a kind of “ethics as first philosophy”: there is no “truth for truth’s sake”; all investigations are guided by moral awareness. Taking these principles together, Burkhart claims: “The guiding question for the entire philosophical enterprise is, then: what is the right road for humans to walk?”

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<sup>1</sup> Burkhart quickly notes that these “principles” are mere abstractions for ways of being, and that Native American epistemology prioritizes knowing as doing over propositional knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Burkhart, Brian Yazzie, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of Native American Epistemology,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, A. Waters, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), page 16.

<sup>3</sup> Burkhart, Brian Yazzie, “What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of Native American Epistemology,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, A. Waters, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), pages 16-17.

A response to this question begins with the recognition that the proper context for the pursuit of knowledge is communal, rather than individual. The data of experience should be sought primarily in the form of the “We,” not “I”; if experience is essential to knowledge, it is not important that it is “I” who have the experiences, as the knowledge is shared by the community. One’s community provides the moral framework of our understanding. In another article on Native American epistemology, “Ethics and Understanding,” John DuFour argues that our beliefs arise from our practices and that our beliefs are expressed in our practices. Since our practices are always undertaken among others, beliefs are themselves social practices. This entails that beliefs are inherently normative. My process of belief formation must be guided by moral concern. Given the priority of the group over the individual, the guiding moral standard for my belief formation is harmony with and within the community.

Viola Cordova also addresses the relationship of individual to community in her essay, “Ethics: The We and the I,” focusing more squarely on the topic of morality. Like Burkhart and DuFour, Cordova insists on the priority of the “We” over the “I” and does so by exposing points of disanalogy between Native American and Western moral frameworks. Cordova begins by noting that assumptions about human nature provide the basis for whether a community understands proper behavior to rest upon individual or group action. Western society (which she describes as “I-principle” society) understands human nature in terms of individuals in conflict. By contrast, human nature in what she calls “We-principle” societies—including the Native American—is understood to be essentially social. The other is interdependent with the self; without the group, there is no self.

Cordova argues that the “We-principle” worldview is both conceptually and morally more adequate than the “I-principle” view: “If there were no others, or if the individual were truly autonomous, there would be no need to adjust one’s behavior in order to maintain membership in a group.”<sup>4</sup> An implication of this “We” oriented view of human nature and moral awareness is the emphasis on cooperation within the community. Cordova sees a “We-principle” counterpart

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<sup>4</sup> Cordova, V. F., “Ethics: The We and the I,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, A. Waters, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), page 174.

in the ancient Greek philosophers who stand at the beginnings of that Western tradition she critiques; in Aristotle, for whom human beings are “inherently social,” and in Socrates, who “drinks the hemlock and refuses the offer to flee Athens for the good of the society which he has so annoyed.”<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Greeks, however, Cordova tells us that,

“the Native American adds to the We definition of human beings the idea of *equality*. . . . The equality is based on the notion, often unstated, that everything that is, is of one process. The Native American . . . has a more inclusive sense of the We than others who share the sense of humans as social beings.”<sup>6</sup>

The concept of the moral community extends beyond the specifically human to all forms of life, to the universe which participates in the life process. The moral duty to establish and maintain group harmony is directed to the whole of the natural world within which we find ourselves.

#### IDEALISM, EDUCATION, AND NATURE

The clearest account of Schelling’s views on the relationship between education and the natural world, at least for the early years of his career, appear in a series of lectures, *On University Studies*, delivered at the University of Jena in 1802 and 1803. Within these lectures, Schelling offers a diagnosis of the ailments of the University, as well as a set of arguments for remedying those ills. The lectures begin with the dramatic description of the student’s malaise:

It is at the very beginning of his university career that a young man first comes into contact with the world of science. The more taste and inclination he has for science, the more likely it is that this world will strike him as a chaos, a confused mass, a vast ocean upon which he is launched without star or compass. Students who really enjoy clear sight of their goal are unfortunately rare exceptions to this rule. What usually happens is that the better-organized minds throw themselves haphazardly into every conceivable study. Striking out in every direction at once, they never get to the heart of any one subject,

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<sup>5</sup> Cordova, V. F., “Ethics: The We and the I,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, A. Waters, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), page 174.

<sup>6</sup> Cordova, V. F., “Ethics: The We and the I,” in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*, A. Waters, ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), pages 176-177.

which is the only way to attain a many-sided, well-rounded culture. At best, by the end of their academic career they are rewarded with insight into how fruitless their labors have been—they see how much they have learned to no purpose and how many essentials they have neglected. Lesser minds, meanwhile, practice resignation from the outset, keep to the beaten track, and at most try to assimilate—applying themselves mechanically, merely memorizing—only as much as they suppose will be profitable in their future trade or profession.<sup>7</sup>

This passage is most explicitly a diagnosis of what Schelling takes to be a dire problem confronting the organization and activity of the university model of his age. The university as it presently stands, he claims, fails the best young minds, and encourages a machine-like existence in the rest of its students.

It is worth noting two subtle gestures contained within the passage above. First, Schelling contrasts here two approaches to university studies: one that “[s]trik[es] out in every direction at once,” and one that would “get to the heart of . . . one subject.” It is only the second path—getting to the heart of a subject—which is truly suited for acquiring a “many-sided, well-rounded culture.” This “well-rounded culture” (or “well-rounded education”) is evidently of much significance for Schelling. It is a reference to the *Bildungsfrage*, a concern of much currency in the age. The concern is over how best to cultivate, formulate, and educate an individual; specifically, over whether and how the university achieves this goal. Education has both an intellectual and moral purpose.

There is an apparent tension in Schelling’s insistence that the proper approach to developing a well-rounded culture is focusing one’s research on the core of a single subject. On the face of it, “striking out in every direction” seems better suited for “many-sidedness” than does an all-encompassing concern for one subject. In fact, Schelling’s proposal even brings together the contraries, “one” and “many,” in an unexpected way. This apparent tension is resolved within Schelling’s identity-philosophy. If the universal is always refracted in the particular, then “single-minded” devotion to one subject will lead to knowledge of the universal. Only by way of a genuine engagement with a particular matter

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<sup>7</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., *On University Studies*, E. S. Morgan, trans. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1966), pages, 5-6. Hereafter, “US.”

will one arrive a true understanding of the interconnectedness of the whole. Moreover, the very opposition of “one” and “many” in this context could only be supposed from a position that neglects the more fundamental identity of identity and difference.

Also noteworthy is his characterization of the university’s products, specifically those who fall under the heading of “lesser minds”: they “at most try to assimilate—applying themselves *mechanically*, merely memorizing—only as much as they suppose will be profitable in their future trade or profession.” I cannot help but hear a resonance with Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, in which he formulates a system of nature opposed to the mechanistic conception favored in his day. We can infer from this early passage that Schelling believes that the troubling symptoms he is addressing result from a basic misunderstanding of nature and of human being’s relation to nature.

Not only the scientific research undertaken by the university, but also the education of the university student, must express a proper relation of human to nature. Schelling examines the difference between fit and unfit teachers, and the effect each has on the university as a whole. “A teacher who merely transmits [knowledge],” Schelling claims, “will often give a radically false version of what he learned” (US 26). This kind of teacher comes to the science externally, never grasping the essence or most fundamental justifications for the products of that science. He aims to communicate the conclusions of previous scholars and researchers, without first grasping the work through which those conclusions were reached. He is one “who lives within his science as though on another’s property, who is not himself in possession, who has never acquired a sure and living feeling for it who is incapable of sitting down and reconstructing it for himself” (US 26).

The adept teacher must not rest at an external acquaintance with science, but must submit herself to a living grasp of it. For this, she must engage the “science of science”—philosophy—and comprehend the situation of all in the absolute. Schelling begins his account of a worthy educator by assuming, for the sake of argument only, the popular view of the task of a university, namely, an “institution for the transmitting of knowledge, ... where a young man learns all that has been accomplished in science down to his day” (US 26). Supposing the transmission of knowledge to be the sole task of the university, it remains imperative that this “be intelligently effected” (US 26). Some necessary conditions must be met by anyone

who seeks to transmit knowledge, let alone expand it. For one, Schelling claims, “the university lecturer is supposed to explain his subject genetically.” This comes as no surprise, as Schelling himself was committed to, for instance, a genetic account of self-consciousness from the lower potencies of nature in his philosophy of nature and identity-philosophy. Given that instruction consists of the (temporal) elucidation of the science itself, we should expect that Schelling would argue that the method of instruction should mirror the method by which the knowledge is acquired.

More specifically, Schelling insists that the transmission of knowledge, if it is to be successful, must re-create the acquisition of that knowledge: “the lecturer does not merely give results, . . . but shows—in the higher sciences at least—how these results were reached, and at every point builds up the whole science, as it were, before the student’s eyes” (US 27). In reconstructing a science genetically, the teacher points the way to the science for her student, “not as something ready-made, but as something the student must rediscover for himself” (US 28).

This view is expressed in 1800’s *System of Transcendental Idealism* as well. Schelling notes early in this work that the transcendental methodology employed there “consists, in short, of a constant objectifying-to-itself of the subjective.”<sup>8</sup> The kind of knowledge Schelling seeks to transmit in the 1800 text cannot simply be handed down from author to reader, teacher to student; it must be reconstructed historically, that is, genetically, by both parties. “The self,” asserts Schelling, “is nothing else but a *producing that becomes an object to itself*, that is, an intellectual intuition” (STI 28). The presentation and comprehension of the system of philosophy, if genuine, arises from and as the free activity of the participant. The teacher cannot simply repeat the conclusions of the science, but must be taken up by the science itself.

So, the educator must invite the student into the world of science, by genetically reconstructing the process by which its knowledge is acquired. This must include a direct inquiry into nature itself—not merely a history of scientific discovery—and this seeks to produce a well-rounded student, cognitively and morally. The Lectures *On University* thus suggest possibilities for moral education

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<sup>8</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., *System of Transcendental Idealism*, P. Heath, trans. (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978), page 9. Hereafter, “STI.”



via the study of nature.

In the sixth Lecture, “On the Study of Philosophy,” Schelling introduces a discussion of the importance of comprehending soul and body in their identity. The importance can be seen in his treatment of the studies of psychology and physics. The inquiries conducted in the name of psychology, he claims, “rest upon the assumption that soul and body are opposites,” as the understanding represents them (US 65). A true science of the soul would dispense with such rigid distinctions and begin from a recognition of the more fundamental “absolute unity of soul and body, i.e., the Idea of man” (US 65).

The fault in the empirical approach to psychology lies, unsurprisingly, in physics as well—or, we might say, the problem lies in the fabricated fault asserted between psychology and physics, a division deriving from the treatment of thought and nature as irrevocably separate. Physics and psychology should be investigated each through the other, for they share identity in the absolute idea. But physics, “as it is today, deals only with the body and assumes that matter and nature are dead” (US 65). A consistent criticism waged by Schelling against many philosophical and scientific predecessors and contemporaries emphasizes this tendency to think matter as purely corporeal. Corporeality, he contends, rests upon the more fundamental matter; when it is thought as identical with matter (i.e., when matter is reduced to the corporeal), a mechanistic view of nature is a natural conclusion. “The true science of nature,” though, “cannot be based on such premises but only on the identity of soul and body in all things” (US 65). This position, central to his nature-philosophy and identity philosophy, and a premise upon which his university program is based, retains importance for Schelling during later periods of his work.

Nevertheless, a kind of one-sidedness has its proper place in science. It lies in the specialization necessary for uncovering of the wealth of truths lying in a particular region of inquiry. This specialization remains unproblematic so long as the study maintains its recognition of its place within the absolute. In the Seventh Lecture, “Philosophy vs. the Positive Sciences,” Schelling calls attention to the difference of infinite and finite cognition:

An intelligence that could in a single cognitive act apprehend the absolute whole as a system complete in every part, including both the ideal and the real aspects, would thereby cease to be finite, would apprehend all things as actually one and, for this reason, would not apprehend anything as determinate (US 75).

Such a perspective would be characteristic of a divine intellect. While the task of philosophy is to establish and reveal the absolute as the basis for knowledge, it trades in the realm of the ideal, and is thus in need of a real counterpart:

The real (as opposed to ideal) aspect of primordial knowledge is represented by the other sciences, but in them all things are isolated and separated; they can never actually be unified in the individual, only in the species (US 75).

The task of the individual sciences, then, is to reconstruct the historical unfolding of their respective domains. The properly organized university is one in which these specialized reconstructions are removed from their relative isolations and oriented toward the absolute center, and has included among its aims both the cognitive and moral formation of the student by way of the study of nature.

#### EMERSON ON THE SANCTITY OF NATURE

In a 2007 article, Douglas Anderson considers Emerson's relationship to Schelling: "In some ways, Emerson is ... directly influenced by Schelling's writings. ... In other ways, Emerson simply moved in the spirit of Schelling's thought."<sup>9</sup> Emerson adopts, for example, Schelling's dialectal account of mind and nature: a historico-genetic emergence of the organic from the inorganic, and in turn the emergence of consciousness from the organic, at which point the emergent mind can turn back to its material basis in order to grasp its relationship to that ground. "It is a long way from granite to the oyster; farther yet to Plato, and the preaching of the immortality of the soul," Emerson observes, in his 1844 essay, "Nature." "Yet all must come, surely as the atom has two sides."<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the essay—and his career—Emerson attends to the issue of the position of the self in the natural environment. On the one hand, he seeks to erode the distinction: "We talk of deviations from natural life, as if artificial life were not also natural" (RWE 548). But, he also notices a feature of our experience, wherein we feel estranged from that to which we belong: "The pine-tree, the river, the bank of flowers before him, does not seem to be nature. Nature

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<sup>9</sup> Anderson, Douglas, "Emerson's Schellingian Natures," in *Cognitio*, Volume 8, Number 1 (Jan/June 2007), pages 13-22. (14)

<sup>10</sup> Emerson, Ralph Waldo, *The Complete Essays and Other Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Ed.: B. Atkinson. (New York: The Modern Library, 1940), page 547. Hereafter, "RWE."

is still elsewhere” (RWE 553). This puts me in mind of Burkhart’s “Principle of Relatedness,” as it suggests a failure to observe that, “the most important things to keep in mind are the simple things that are directly around us in our experience.”

Emerson’s essay also expresses respect for something like a “principle of the limits of questioning”: “To the intelligent, nature converts itself into a vast promise, and will not be rashly explained. Her secret is untold” (RWE 554). He also gestures at the consequences of transgressing those limits: “Astronomy to the selfish becomes astrology; psychology, mesmerism; ... and anatomy and physiology, become phrenology and palmistry” (RWE 546). As I will discuss below, this echoes Schelling’s treatment of evil as a selfish perversion of our proper relationship to the whole.

I wish to call attention to Emerson’s view of nature as a site of moral education. Throughout the essay, Emerson speaks of a sanctity to nature, which rescues us from the profane, of humans as “novitiates” training in a proper spirituality (RWE 542-543). “Here is sanctity which shames our religions, and reality which discredits our heroes. Here we find nature to be the circumstance which dwarfs every other circumstance, and judges like a god all men who come to her” (RWE 541). Here, Emerson revitalizes nature, and offers a path to a renewal of human self-understanding and conscience. I feel shame when caught acting poorly by another, and this shame motivates me to act better. Perhaps I can acknowledge nature as witness who judges me also.

Perhaps I feel a stronger sense of shame before those closest to me. If I am truly to feel the power of nature’s judgment, I must know nature. I must, as Douglas Anderson emphasizes, “choose to enter into it and to suffer its judgement.”<sup>11</sup> And, a more authentic moral relationship to nature should be based, not only in shame and fear, but in love, which holds two things together in union, even as they remain, each what they are. Emerson also calls nature, “an old friend” (RWE 542).

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson, Douglas, “Emerson’s Schellingian Natures,” in *Cognitio*, Volume 8, Number 1 (Jan/June 2007), pages 13-22. (16)

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## NATURE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

By the time he composes the essay *Of Human Freedom* in 1809, Schelling's thought has undergone significant transformations. Looking back (much later) upon his earlier work (including identity-philosophy), Schelling remarks that "it seems impossible that this system is false, but on the other hand, one will senses something in it that prevents one from declaring that it is the ultimate truth."<sup>12</sup> This reorientation of his thinking erodes some of his earlier epistemological optimism, and this has a number of possibly troublesome implications for his philosophy of education (as it pertains, at least, to the transmission of knowledge). If his optimism concerning the aims of education is weakened, his moral thinking becomes more robust, and within this moral thought we find a revitalized orientation to nature.

Even as Schelling's philosophy undergoes significant transformations during the years leading up to 1809 (and beyond), there are important threads of continuity as well, and there is evidence in *Human Freedom* of a commitment to the epistemic value of our encounters with the natural world. We can find such evidence, for example, in a defense of pantheism which relies on the proper and "higher application of the law of identity." While conceding that the individual in the pantheistic system is characterized by dependence, this does not suffice for the denial of individual freedom. "Dependence," Schelling argues, "does not determine the nature of the dependent, and merely declares that the dependent entity, whatever else it may be, can only be as a consequence of that upon which it is dependent."<sup>13</sup> The individual relies on something aside from itself for its coming into being (as that which it is), but this does not preclude the possibility of its self-determination. Moreover, the individual is thinkable only in relation to the whole, but at the same time is thinkable *as* individuated only in distinction from the whole.

This is, to some extent at least, consistent with positions Schelling holds in the 1797 *Ideas* and the 1799 *First Outline*; namely, a historico-genetic emergence of the organic from the inorganic, and in turn the emergence of consciousness from the

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<sup>12</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., Bruno, or, On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things, M. G. Vater, trans. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), page 76.

<sup>13</sup> Schelling, F. W. J., Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom, J. Gutmann, trans. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1936) page 18. Hereafter, "HF."

organic, at which point the emergent mind can turn back to its material basis in order to grasp its relationship to the latter. I find resonance between Schelling's thinking here and some features of the Native American epistemology discussed earlier in this paper, which I hope will shine a new light on the moral dimension of Schelling's thought in *Human Freedom*. I have in mind especially the two principles, the "meaning-shaping principle of action" and the "moral universe principle." Taken together, these principles suggest that our interactions with the natural world teach us about both the character of the world but also ourselves, and that meaning and value arises in that interaction, so there are moral obligations governing such interaction and investigation.

Consider again the "higher application of the law of identity," which Schelling insists preserves the possibility of human freedom: "dependence does not determine the nature of the dependent"; also, "it would be contradictory if that which is dependent...were not autonomous." Selfhood and autonomy are comprehensible only in relation to the whole (or the natural order) from which the self emerges. My encounter with the whole (or nature) makes me aware of myself as individual, and it is in this encounter also that I recognize my freedom.

This recognition of freedom brings along with it moral sense (as Schelling notes, "in the last instance the essence of the moral world is also the essence of the world of nature" (HF 13)). The genuine conception of freedom is the possibility for good and evil. Taking a cue from both Burkhart's outline of Native American epistemology and Cordova's account of Native American ethics, we can illuminate this aspect of Schelling's thought in *Human Freedom*, namely, the significance of nature for morality. Michelle Kosch calls attention to this in her 2014 essay, "Idealism and Freedom in Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*," wherein she elucidates the manner in which Schelling situates the human person both ontologically and morally within the context of the great whole. Schelling develops a new ontology by offering, Kosch explains, "an account of the constitution of things (including persons) as products of the operation of two fundamental principles portrayed in terms of various oppositions," including the will of the "ground" and the will of "existence" or "love."<sup>14</sup> "Existence" stands for the discursively relatable world of possible experience, while "ground" is the real

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<sup>14</sup> Kosch, Michelle, "Idealism and Freedom in Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*," in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays*, L. Ostaric, ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2014), page 155.

basis for such experience. Existence is rational; ground resists total rational articulation. Existence, the expansive will to universality, depends upon a contractive will to particularity in order to manifest. Just as universality is incomprehensible without particularity—unification isn't possible without opposition—the reverse is true: particularity is incoherent without the whole from which it is distinguished.

Evil is the striving of the will to particularity to subordinate the universalizing will to itself. In evil activity, we forget our relationship to that upon which we depend, and abuse our freedom to make ourselves the meaning of that to which we belong. Approached through the framework of the Native American moral theory articulated by Cordova, the “I-principle” that predominates Western ethics is revealed as a foundation for evil. Schelling’s position, that the choice between good and evil is a choice between a subordination to the whole and egotism, bears resemblance to Cordova’s insistence on the need to prioritize the “We” as the foundation for moral life.

The symptoms of evil are evident in the natural world, Schelling suggests, in the forms of disease and the “irrational and accidental”:

“The irrational and accidental element which reveals itself as connected with what is necessary in the formation of all beings, especially organic ones, proves that it was not merely a geometric necessity which operated here, but that freedom, spirit, and self-will played their part too” (HF 52-3).

“[D]isease...is the true counterpart of evil and sin, as it constitutes that disorder which entered nature through as misuse of freedom” (HF 41).

This appears to be theodicy, but it can be read instead as an account of the consequences of human evil for the world we inhabit. In his book, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, Vine Deloria, Jr., suggests (in the context of a discussion of the significance of sacred sites for the performance of traditional Native ceremony) that,

“the cumulative effect of continuous secularity ... poses [a] danger. Long-standing prophecies tell us of the impious people who would ... cause the massive destruction of the planet. ... The cumulative evidence of global warming, acid rain, the disappearance of amphibians, overpopulation, and other products of civilized life certainly testify to the possibility of these prophecies being correct.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Deloria, Jr., Vine, *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Fulcrum, 1972), page

Schelling's account of the possibility and actuality of evil may be consistent with this. The human moral responsibility includes the recognition of the self's proper situation within the network of the greater whole of nature; the failure maintain harmony with the natural world (by falling into the temptation of egotism) allows the chaotic dark principle to express itself.

I conclude with some reflections on this project. To begin, is this project legitimate? Deloria also calls attention to another kind of danger, non-Natives "who seek entrance and participation in ceremonies and rituals": "Most non-Indians see in tribal religions the experiences and reverence that are missing in their own heritage. No matter how hard they try, they always reduce the teachings and ceremonies to a complicated word game and ineffectual gestures." Does reading Schelling alongside works in Native American philosophy rely too much on the effacement of difference between worldviews?

While Schelling insists that evil is an expression of egotism, and that good consists in submitting oneself to a proper place within the greater whole, what kinds of specific moral content can be derived from this? A similar problem arises for Emerson. Time spent with nature is necessary for a transformation of selfhood, but it clearly isn't sufficient. "The difference between landscape and landscape is small," suggests Emerson, "but there is great difference in the beholders." In a time of ecological crisis, how do we transform beholders?

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