

the meaningless a meaning. Meaning begins with a paradox. It has its boundary within itself. The outside is inside. There is no God without the Devil who has somehow been willed by God, and no Being without Nothingness that somehow "is." As theologians have always known, it is best to cover up this embarrassing contradiction at the foundation of the world by shrouding it in mystery.

«5» So let us concentrate on what God created, namely reality. Reality is how God, Being, Maya, the Ancestors, or whatever, *arbitrarily* and *contingently* spells out whatever He, She, It, They are. These are myths, or as Schmidt would say, "reality models" (§19). This is a body of knowledge that distinguishes between what belongs in the world and what does not, what works and what is bound to failure, what is good and what is bad. It is always already there. It emerges through the ongoing operations of the system of meaning, that is, processes of differences that make differences. These operations are often steered by an important difference between "we" and "they." Schmidt speaks of "cultural programs" (§20). The difference this distinction makes determines the success or failure of communication. Intercultural communication is a problem. When "we" run up against cultural boundaries, differences between, for example, men and women, fathers and sons, teachers and students, bosses and workers do not seem to make a difference anymore, or at least, they do not fit and function smoothly together. One cannot even say "hello" without offending or being misunderstood by "them." Once it became clear in the post-colonial world that these problems could not be solved by forcing the They to become the We, intercultural communication, like all communication problems, became a problem to be solved by constructing new differences that make new differences, or, as Schmidt might say, "enable and schematize options for actions" (§20). Here a *pragmatic* constructivism makes a difference because it is the only viable alternative to fundamentalism, relativism, and post-modern cynicism. Actors become "tourists" and "foreigners" instead of "barbarians" or "madmen;" "strange gods" become "ethnologists;" "white demons" become "businessmen." Schmidt speaks of these processes as "histories" and "discourses."

«6» Processing differences is hard work. It is negotiating, translating, enrolling, and displacing boundaries of the real, the true, the good, the normal, etc. And of course, every difference supposes, presupposes, and implies everything else (§23–27). As Wittgenstein pointed out, one cannot speak just one word: to know a word is to know an entire language. But who is doing the work? At least four kinds of actors, all interdependent, have already appeared: the *system*, however it names itself as a whole; the *culture*, however it integrates the social roles it is made up of; the *social roles*, the "personae," whatever they may be; and, in some cases, *individuals* who may or may not understand themselves in distinction to many other things as "humans." What more do we need? Do we need observers? Do we need to talk about objective reality, about subjects, consciousness, reflexivity, etc? I think the point of Schmidt's fascinating and fruitful rewriting of constructivism is that we do not; we can simply "*dissolve* the debate" (§5). Perhaps we do not even need to move from objects to processes. Perhaps we do not need to call up old ghosts who are no longer "real-for-us" (§42) and negotiate their passage once again. We do not need to shift epistemological orientations from "objects of knowledge to the knowledge of objects" (§9), or substitute the adjectives for substantives (§42), or discover "cognitive as well as social/communication components" (§47) in something called "knowing" (§47 ff.), which in turn requires talking about "reflexive operations" (§51). We can simply leave these things behind and turn to making those differences that make a difference, or as Schmidt himself concludes: "The decisive question...is which acting potentials are opened by perception" (§76). My perception of Schmidt's rewriting of constructivism opens up the potential of *constructive* commentary instead of critique, new-thinking instead of contra-arguments, branching out to other problems and involving other actors instead of locking in to an exhausted and perhaps purely academic discussion. If we find ourselves in a position today to do this, then this due to the constructive work of Siegfried J. Schmidt.

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Does Schmidt's Process-Orientated Philosophy Contain a Vicious Infinite Regress Argument?

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> **Upshot** • This commentary asks if Schmidt's latest process-orientated philosophy is based on a vicious infinite regress argument. The commentator uses recent literature on the distinction of vicious and benign infinite regresses (from Claude Gratton and Nicholas Rescher) and tries to show that – taken verbatim – there is a serious logical problem in Schmidt's argumentation.

«1» One of the crucial points in Siegfried J. Schmidt's latest process-orientated philosophy is the question of whether it contains a vicious infinite regress argument in its logical foundation. When Schmidt claims that "every single positing that we make here and now has been preceded by other positings we (can) more or less consciously relate" (§23), this argument strongly calls to mind the pattern of a classical vicious infinite regress chain endlessly going backwards, like "every intelligent act is preceded by an intelligent act" (Gratton 2010: 3). In both variants, the ordering term "precede" indicates that the chain endlessly goes back in time – which leads to the well-known contradiction that time does *not* endlessly go back (neither for individuals nor for the whole universe, neither ontogenetic nor phylogenetic). An infinite regress is vicious if it leads to contradictory, unacceptable results (which is the case in both arguments). Rewritten in the terms of

Claude Gratton, Schmidt obviously wanted to say:

- 1 | *Regress formula*: Every single positing is preceded by at least another positing, mostly even by many other positings (called presuppositions).
- 2 | *Triggering statement*: Act_1 is a positing.
- 3 | *Infinite regress*: Act_1 is preceded by at least another (therefore prior) positing, for example act_2 . Act_2 is preceded by at least another (therefore prior) positing, for example act_3 . *Ad infinitum*. (Cf. Diagram 1 in Gratton 2010: 3)

« 2 » However, (3) leads to the conclusion that “[o]ne has performed infinitely many [...] acts” (Gratton 2010: 3). We must admit at the same time that *no* human *ever* has performed infinitely many acts. So there is a contradiction here that logically leads to the consequence that the regress formula (1) is wrong. Does that mean that Schmidt’s whole new philosophy cannot fulfill its promises? No, because Schmidt uses a rhetorical trick: he *limits* his infinite regress argument by reducing the interplay of presupposition and positing to the time span “[a]s far as we can judge within our lifetime” (§23). But what does that mean? That the infinite regress apparently going endlessly backwards is interrupted, that our memory limits the regress within our lifetime (that the “end” of our memory going backwards is the “regress breaker”)? We are now at the core of the problem of the beginning of the mutual elaboration of presupposition and positing.

« 3 » There only seem to be two possibilities: either we do *not* limit the infinite regress chain, then the statement, “Every single positing is preceded by other positings,” implies a contradiction with the limitedness of our past life (and even, if we expand the domain, seen cosmologically, to theories of the “beginning” of the universe, such as, for example, the Big Bang theory), or we *do* set a limit. Then immediately the question of the beginning arises (again): *When exactly* was the first conscious act (“as far as we can judge within our lifetime”) that we can meaningfully call a positing (and presupposition at the same time)? Was it the time when “I” expanded into a morula? My first drinking out of the amnion? My first playing with fingers in my mother’s womb? My first cry after birth? Or is my first conscious act/positing

“as far as I can judge within my lifetime” somehow connected with language-triggered memory? (In this case, we could not speak of any positings before the second or third year of my life).

« 4 » Please note the serious logical problem also hidden in the following statement: “Every positing – in the cognitive or the practical domain – draws upon at least one presupposition.” (§24) It is one of Schmidt’s most inspiring ideas that we *always come too late*. When we start to speak, the world has already been here²²; when our self-consciousness and our self-concept arise, many things have already happened that influenced this constitutive process, and so on. (And for some people, when they first start to think deeply about their future, too many wrong decisions have already been made in the past). So we are always too late; we literally always “wake up too late.”

« 5 » If we apply this to the problem of the first positing, we can clearly see that neither “I” as a morula nor “I” as a blastula have anything to do with the (search for the) “beginning” of, in this example, myself. The morula is prior to the blastula, and also before the morula there was a cell cloud, and so on. The search for the beginning here, in the early stage of “my” development as a human being, seems useless.

« 6 » But if *every* positing draws upon *at least one* presupposition, this chain again *endlessly goes back* in time (and transcends the beginning of my life in the form of cell clouds). We can, for example, argue: The fact (positing, process, whatever) that I turned into an early embryo is (in the regular case) drawn upon at least one presupposition: that my parents had sex together. The fact (positing, process, whatever) that my parents had sex together is drawn upon at least one presupposition: that they loved each other or at least found each other in some way attractive or wanted to have a baby, and so on. This regress goes back endlessly as the (also vicious)

22| This is a claim that Mitterer’s nondualism would interpret this differently: in his thought-provoking concept, the world that already has been there is only conceivable *after* the description “world;” so there is a new, more radical language-dependency of all statements and perceptions. But this is another topic; see Mitterer (1992) and Riegler & Weber (2008).

regress of reasons (Gratton 2010; Rescher 2010). We will come to the (very early) stage when we can say: The fact (positing, process, whatever) that the universe came into existence is drawn upon at least one presupposition. But... Which one? That God created it?

« 7 » There is an inspiring answer that Hawking gave to this problem: the curvature of time in the “beginning” of the universe to avoid the question of what was prior to the beginning. It would be interesting to apply this theory to Schmidt’s process-orientated philosophy in order to avoid it being constructed upon a vicious infinite regress argument. Another option would be that Schmidt does not care about classical (dualistic!) infinite regresses at all – just as Luhmann included paradoxes in his theory. A third hope would be a universe not starting with the Big Bang, but endlessly going backwards. Within this universe, no vicious infinite regress arises.

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The Missing Links in S. J. Schmidt’s Rewriting Operations: An Austrian Contribution

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> **Upshot** • The subtitle of “An Austrian Contribution” emphasizes a basic distinction between German and Austrian traditions in the philosophy of fields of science. In Siegfried J. Schmidt’s genu-