The Becoming-Life-of-Life: An Investigation into the Relationship between Nature and Freedom in F.W.J. Schelling

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The present thesis is an investigation into the intimacy between nature and freedom through the work of F.W. J. Schelling. The guiding question that I will be asking throughout the text is what calls for, or necessitates, a philosophy of nature? On the one hand, this question asks about the motivating factors, themes, and concerns that articulated Schelling's philosophy of nature, whether one considers this inquiry as simply a "phase" that Schelling passes through among others or *the* inquiry that defines Schelling's overall philosophical career. On a deeper level however, the question asks about the very relationship between philosophy and nature: how does nature concern philosophy? Is it simply one of the regions of beings that philosophy engages or did philosophy originate entirely out of a concern, even care, for nature?

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DEDICATION

For My Parents and for My American Mother Lisa Schnepper

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Introduction

The present thesis is an investigation into the intimacy between nature and freedom through the work of F.W. J. Schelling. The guiding question that I will be asking throughout the text is what calls for, or necessitates, a philosophy of nature? On the one hand, this question asks about the motivating factors, themes, and concerns that articulated Schelling's philosophy of nature, whether one considers this inquiry as simply a "phase" that Schelling passes through among others or *the* inquiry that defines Schelling's overall philosophical career.[1] On a deeper level however, the question asks about the very relationship between philosophy and nature: how does nature concern philosophy? Is it simply one of the regions of beings that philosophy engages or did philosophy originate entirely out of a concern, even care, for nature?

In the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling famously proclaims that "the entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground."[2] I interpret this utterance to mean: modern philosophy hitherto shared the common assumption that in order to know anything about nature, one must begin with the mind. Schelling, on the other hand, argues the reverse: nothing about human beings can become intelligible without a prior investigation into nature. One may immediately reject: why should the starting point matter? Are not the way up and the way down one and the same? As it turns out, they are not the same, for the simple reason that there is a ground upon which no reason could be conferred.

Much of what I have written in the following pages was provoked by a single passage in the *Freedom Essay*. I will introduce it here as a way of anchoring my interpretation. At the very starting point of Schelling's presentation of the ground/existence distinction, Schelling speaks of a "yearning" that the "eternal One feels to give birth to itself."[3] He then states that the "essence of yearning" presents the most challenging task to understanding because it has long been "repressed" by the "higher things that have arisen out of it." The full passage reads:

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[1] Scholarship generally divides Schelling's intellectual development into several phases or periods, they are 1) the Fichtean period, 2) philosophy of nature, 3) identity philosophy, and 4) later period. While this kind of periodization is useful in charting out certain distinctive features, themes, or approaches, its problem is also evident since it tends to emphasize difference between periods rather than their continuity.

[2] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), p. 26 [OA 427-430].

[3] Ibid., 28.

> After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground.[4]

If Schelling is right, that there is an "incomprehensible base of reality in things" that the understanding could never penetrate, then any inquiry into nature that begins with the mind is doomed from the start.

It does not happen very often that the first principal idea of a philosophical system starts with incomprehensibility itself. But this is precisely how Schelling's philosophy of nature began. In one of his earliest philosophical writings, Schelling makes a distinction between "matter" and "elements" in Plato's *Timaeus*. This is a strange distinction since the elements, construed as the building blocks of the universe, are precisely what we normally mean by "matter." But Schelling interpretation challenges this assumption, for he argues that "elements were originally invisible because they had not yet acquired the form of the understanding (through which alone they are able to appear and become objects of experience)."[5] Matter, in this case, pertains precisely to what elements *were* prior to their delimitation by the forms. In other words, because matter needs form in order to appear or constitute itself as the elements, it is not already informed; by itself, matter is invisible, dark, and "free of all forms."[6]

A similar figuration (or lack thereof) appears in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. In discussing Kant's dynamic understanding of matter as the interplay between repulsion and attraction, Schelling says: "repulsive force without attractive force is formless; attractive force without repulsive force has no object."[7] While this sentence is generally thought as a reference to Kant's famous words in the first *Critique* "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without

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[4] Ibid.,29.
[5] Schelling, "*Timaeus (1794)*," trans. Adam Arola, Jena Jolissaint, and Peter Warnek. *Epoché*, Volume 12, Issue 2 (Spring 2008), p.229.
[6] *Tim.* 50 E.
[7] Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris & Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.187.

concepts are blind,"[8] it also contains a subtle allusion to matter in the *Timaeus Essay*, for Schelling immediately relates the repulsive force to an "original, unconscious…self-activity, which is by nature unrestricted."[9]

Towards the end of Schelling's *On the World Soul*, he presents the "positive principle of life" by writing:

> Now this principle is only restricted in its effects by the receptivity of the material with which it has been identified, and indeed different organs will arise according to different degrees of receptivity. For precisely that reason that principle, although sensitive to all forms, is itself originally formless (ἄμορφον) and is nowhere exhibited as a determinate matter.[10]

Furthermore, Schelling says: "Since, as the cause of life, this principle withdraws from all observation and so is concealed in its own works, it can only be known in the particular phenomena in which it emerges."[11]

These passages that I have traced thus far have in common the following features: they are, without exception, the first principles of his philosophy of nature, though iterated under different contexts. Furthermore, they all tend to conceal themselves *as* first principles and stand in need of delimitation as a medium of their visibility: matter requires form, repulsion needs attraction, productivity requires inhibition. This begs the question of whether we could glimpse into this first principle in itself by seizing upon its very formlessness. Regarding the essence of yearning, Schelling writes: "we cannot grasp it by the senses but rather only with the mind and [in]thought."[12] One should note the potential contradiction here: if the ground were indeed "incomprehensible" as Schelling claims, how can we grasp it with "the mind and in thought"?

In the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling proposes a theory of dynamic atomism that allows for the infinite divisibility of space without losing the individuality

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[8] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 51/B75. See Kant, I. *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. & trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.193-94.
[9] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.187.
[10] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, p.29 [SW 359-60]

of matter. To this end, he proposes a thinking experiment that precisely addresses the question I have raised above. He writes:

> In brief, our opinion is this: If the evolution of Nature were ever complete (which is impossible), then after the general decomposition of each product into its factors nothing would be left other than simple factors, i.e., factors which are no longer themselves products. Therefore, these simple factors can only be thought as originary actants, or --- if it is permissible to express it in this way --- as originary productivities.[13]

Here, Schelling invites us to think what would remain once the whole of the extended universe or visible nature were to be thoroughly decomposed. The mechanical physicists would say that their atoms should still be there. For Kant, it is space as the *a priori* pure form of intuition. For Fichte, it is the intuiting activity of the I. Not surprisingly, Schelling's response in the quote passage indicates that all three responses are wrong: the physicists are wrong because atoms are themselves extended; Kant is wrong because he thinks forces are only attributable to matter by the understanding while for Schelling it is felt through intuition. Finally, Fichte is wrong because the intuiting I cannot be the ground of the universe.

This thinking experiment is a powerful one because it raises the question of how to think the elusive subject that is nature. More precisely, it foregrounds what it means to think nature *as* a subject. This is where the enormous distance between Schelling and the modern tradition comes to the fore: for Schelling, subjectivity precisely cannot begin from the self-certainty of the *cogito* and its affiliates, instead, the natural starting point of subjectivity lies at the very incomprehensible depth of nature, in the "initial anarchy" of the "formless fluid," of the "whirling sea" of the monads, and of the "μὴ ὄν of the ancients."

If the above determinations are too abstract, let us look at a more concrete though equally provocative thought experiment from Blumenbach. As a biologist well-known for his notion of the "formative drive" (*Bildungstrieb*), Blumenbach speculates, from the existence of fossils, that there once existed a "preworld" (*Vorwelt*) that was wiped out by some known catastrophe. After some time, the "Creator" repopulated the earth by using "the same natural powers to effect the

[13] Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, tr. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p.21.

production of a new organic creation that had filled the same purpose in the preworld."[14] Rather than treating Blumenbach's conjecture as a theory of biological revolution, we could instead ask: how deep or how far does the preworld go? In other words, let us suppose that Blumenbach's catastrophe destroyed the entirety of all living things, does it mean that the earth is now lifeless? No. The very postulation of a Creator, a stand-in for the *Bildungstrieb*, is to account for the strange fact that even if all actual bio-organisms were killed off, there will be still life not only on earth but in the cosmos as such, this is so because the formation of earth's ecosystem is itself a life, though lived in the gradual progression of the inorganic in terms planetary dynamics, geological transformations, meteorological shifts and so on.

Finally, Schelling's central insight can be grasped through an excursion into Aristotle. In Book IX of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle speaks of a peculiar idea allegedly held by the Megarians, he writes:

> There are some people, such as the Megarians, who say that something is potential only when it is active, but when it is not active it is not potential; for instance someone who is not building a house is not capable of building a house, but only the one who is building a house, when he is building a house, is capable of it.[15]

To gather what I have been sketching out into a more definitive expression, like Plato's matter, the first principle of nature is always withdrawn, negated, inhibited, and turned back. But in order to not think like the Megarians, the first principle must exist somewhere, since Plato tells us that "what is neither on earth nor somewhere in heaven is nothing."[16] In other words, its absconding must be thought as the necessary condition for our understanding or knowledge. We can only grasp what matter might be through the elements, since it is only in the latter that form and "matter" are discernable. Yet, Schelling writes: "once the elements appear to us, they also appear to us in the determinate and necessary forms of our intuition, not however as they were originally constituted in the ground."[17] In this decisive sentence that Schelling wrote when he was no more than nineteen years old, the incomprehensible has already dawned on his

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[14] This example is taken from Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conceptions of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.222.
[15] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1046b 30.
[16] *Timaeus*, 52 B-C. Translation from Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. & ed. Peter Kalkavage (Annapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016), p.42.
[17] Schelling, "*Timaeus (1794)*," p. 229.

precocious spirit: matter is not fire or water; it is fire-like as fire is matter-like. Furthermore, water is too fire-like, and fire water-like though not in themselves but through their having been born out of matter. Schelling: "Without this preceding darkness, creatures have no reality; darkness is their necessary inheritance."[18] In short, it was precisely by probing into this "dark inheritance" of all things that Schelling was able to fundamentally displace the site of subjectivity hitherto imprisoned in a "purely human reason."[19]

Years after the *Timaeus Essay*, Schelling would give us a sense of the lasting impression the incomprehensible made upon him, and it is only appropriate to both end and begin my investigation into Schelling with this passage:

> Our reproach is therefore a reaction of the age against itself, or a counterrevolutionary after the revolution, and since on the one hand we have rejected the thoroughgoing will to conceptualization, and at the same time on the other hand nothing reasonable can be expected of us, then we must necessarily have maintained the opposite, [that] unreason [*Unvernunft*], namely, the incomprehensible as such, for the sake of the incomprehensible, is to be made the unique principle…Every fanatic clings to nature and necessarily becomes a philosopher of nature, that is, a kind of magician, an interpreter of sings and spirit conjurer…[20]

Synopsis

Chapter I is an analysis of Schelling's youthful commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* and *Philebus*. As an experimental reading of the Platonic dialogues through the concepts of Kant's critical philosophy, this work has been generally acknowledged in scholarship as the germination of Schelling's philosophy of nature. My analysis focuses on Schelling's innovative reading of Plato's notion of the world-soul while attending to the initial appearance of the formless through Schelling's distinction between matter and the elements.

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[18] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, p.29 [SW. 359-360].
[19] Ibid., 4 [OA VIII -XII].
[20] Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, trans. Dale Snow (Albany: SUNY Press, 2018), p.35.

Chapter II deals with two of Schelling's early essays: *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* and *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. Although they were generally considered as works representative of Schelling's "Fichtean period," I argue Schelling was already starting to follow a different path. This divergence is particularly visible in *Philosophical Letters on Criticism and Dogmatism*. In this work, Schelling points out that just as one cannot make the absolute into a not-I as Spinozism has done, one equally cannot turn it into a I like Fichte. In other words, Schelling already realized that a system of the absolute must stay true to the unconditionable character of its subject matter.

Chapter III deals with Schelling's first systematic work on the philosophy of nature: *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. I argue that chemical phenomena disclosed for Schelling an intensive dimension to matter that is immediately connected to our intuition. I call this dimension being-in-nature, which is the idea that sensation is never reducible to the passive impressions of external stimulus but involves an unconscious yet active immersion in the environment. In other words, both matter and mind must be considered as positive; they are only positive and negative when opposed to each other. The limitation of the *Ideas* however rests on the fact that Schelling only thought being-in-nature in human terms. The key, however, lies in how to think being-in-nature for all beings, which is the focus of Chapter IV.

Chapter IV presents Schelling's confrontation with Kant's third *Critique*. I argue that in order to develop an organizational model that could encompass the whole of nature, Schelling has to overcome two major Kantian barriers: the exclusive identification between intentionality and human beings, and the rigid opposition between matter and life. The two barriers come down to the same point: how to find a source of motion or logos in nature? For this purpose, Schelling turned to Leibniz's monadology, which states that inorganic nature is not dead, but only asleep. This means one could construct a system of nature based on the idea of infinite life or differentiating intensities based on emergence and ground: what Schelling wanted to grasp through Kant's natural end, namely, a real system of nature as living animal as originally proposed by Plato, is finally made tenable through Leibniz.

In short, I argue that Leibniz taught Schelling how to think in terms of degrees (I call this idea "degree-being"). If one could assign a degree of life to inorganic nature, then it is also possible to assign a degree of mind to nature (however distant or different this idea of the mind might be

from ours), which ultimately delivers on the original hypothesis: nature is self-organizing and has its own logos. Thus compared to Kant, Schelling's theory of organization can be described as "complete" since he argues that organization is real in the world and that organization is the principle of things, not the reverse. Through this crucial reversal, Schelling has returned to nature what modernity has taken away from it: spontaneity.

Chapter V follows two interrelated trajectories that are both concerned with Schelling's method in uncovering the first principle of nature. The first trajectory deals with a thinking experiment that Schelling proposes in preparation for his "dynamic atomism." As already outlined above, this thinking experiment asks us to suspend the entire realm of *natura naturata* as a way to open up the intensive space of *natura naturans*. I argue that this thinking experiment is a crucial precursor to what Daniel Whistler calls Schelling's "epochē of indifference" as well as what Marie-Luise Heuser calls Schelling's "space philosophy."

The second trajectory deals with one of the major theoretical developments during Schelling's identity philosophy period: depotentiation. By examining *On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems*, my analysis proposes a degree-based approach to the absolute as infinite potencies of the subject-object. The background from which this trajectory emerges is Schelling's critique of Fichte.

The final chapter is an interpretation of the ethical implications of Schelling's philosophy of nature. By closely following the movement of his *Freedom Essay*, I argue that Schelling's understanding of evil is deeply concerned with the question of use in modernity. I argue that the "severability of the principles" that characterizes the human condition entails two kinds of use: the first one is deeply entrenched in the inseparability between use and misuse, while the second one calls for a use of life akin to God's separation into two eternal beginnings.

Chapter I. Nature as Inception: Early Beginnings

> Now to discover the poet and father of this all is quite a task, and even if we discovered him, to speak of him to all men is impossible. *Timaeus*, 29A

> For this Goddess, Philebus, saw everyone's arrogance and all their other wickedness, with no determinant of pleasures and indulgences, and she established law and order as determinants. You, of course, will say she destroyed them, but I think that on the contrary she was their salvation. What's your view, Protarchus? *Philebus*, 26b8-26c2

The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate the ways in which Schelling's engagement with the Platonic dialogues, especially the cosmological sections taken from the *Timaeus* and *Philebus*, as well as Plato's account of poetic inspiration as presented in the *Ion*, sets the stage for his philosophy of nature. The main text I will be focusing on is Schelling's *Timaeus Essay* (1794).

Composed while still studying at the *Tübingen Stift*, the *Timaeus Essay* grew out of Schelling's youthful engagement with the works of Plato and Kant.[21] In scholarship, commentators have realized its relevance for understanding Schelling's early thinking prior to his encounter with Fichte.[22] While many of Schelling's perennial themes make their debut appearance in this text, none rivals the importance of the cosmological horizon of the *Timaeus* itself: throughout his career, Schelling repeatedly experimented with the conceptualities he excavated from this text, to the extent that his *Freiheitsschrift*, considered by many to be his *magnum opus*, would remain incomprehensible without a prior familiarity with this interpretative history.

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[21] The *Timaeus Essay* is found in a notebook entitled *Über den Geist der Platonischen Philosophie* and follows a series of short texts collected under *Form der Platonischen Philosophie*. For the English translations of these texts, see *Timaeus*, tr. Adam Arola, Jena Jolissaint, and Peter Warnek. *Epoché*, Volume 12, Issue 2 (Spring 2008) and *Schelling's Plato Notebooks, 1792-1794*, tr. Naomi Fisher, *Epoché*, Issue 1 (Fall 2021).

[22] In "Plato's Timaeus in German Idealism," Werner Beierwaltes argues that "Schelling's initial impulse regarding the Timaeus was to provide a theoretical interpretation of the visible world, of the universe, of nature." In *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy*, Bruce Matthews presents a thorough reconstruction of Schelling early period, especially with regards to his engagement with Greek philosophy and Kant. Among the numerous studies on the *Timaeus*, I mention *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timaeus* by John Sallis and *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* by Francis Macdonald Cornford. For the *Philebus*, see J. C. B. Gosling's running commentary of his translation of the text.

In what follows, I will trace two trajectories that are integral to my overall investigation into Schelling's philosophy of nature. The first is Schelling's explication of the world-soul, which I argue constitutes Schelling's first attempt at tearing out the "root of opposition" between nature and spirit. In this attempt, I argue Schelling has developed, however inchoately, a theory of materiality that seeks to liberate matter from its traditional determination as a merely passive. The second trajectory is a propaedeutic to Schelling's ontology of organization. Following in the footsteps of Lara Ostaric and others, I argue Schelling's engagement with poetic inspiration is an important steppingstone for his distinctive mode of inquiry into nature. Against the technical interpretations of nature exemplified in mechanistic philosophy, Schelling calls for a participatory and non-representational approach based on the Empedoclean principle "like is known by like" in which "the god outside" is grasped through "the god within."[23]

1.1. Undoing the Platonic Dualism: World-Soul as αρχη κινησεως

Schelling's interpretation of the *Timaeus* covers passages from 28a to 53b, and, of the *Philebus*, from 22e to 30b.[24] These sections are cosmogonic in nature, which is already indicative of the native soil in which Schelling's philosophical seeds were first planted. In the present section, I will place special emphasis on how Schelling sought to dismantle the dualism between the intelligible and the sensible through the mediation of the world-soul. I argue that the crux of this interpretation lies in developing a positive account of matter beyond its traditional determination as involving a passive substrate. In short, matter must be characterized by a power that is not limitable or conditioned by any particular form; this freedom-from-form is precisely the condition for matter to assume a form at all.

[23] Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom,* tr. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), p.10 [OA 401-03].

[24] The *Timaeus* is structured by three discourses respectively given by Socrates, Critias, and Timaeus: Socrates first recounts what he has said in a previous occasion regarding the constitution of an ideal city, then asks his interlocutors to bring this city to life through discourse as their way of reciprocating his generous offering. In response, Critias tells a story that his ancestors have inherited from Salon; driven by political fervent, Critias posits that the very city that Socrates has conjured out of nowhere bears a striking resemblance to the city of the archaic Athenians whose history has become forgotten due to natural disaster and the lack of writing. Once his story has come to a halt, Critias asks Timaeus the astronomer to give an account that extends from the birth of cosmos to the emergence of mankind. Although Critias promises to rejoin the conversation once Timaeus is done, the dialogue ends with Timaeus' cosmogony. For an overview of the dialogue, see the essay by Peter Kalkavage in *Plato: Timaeus*, tr. Peter Kalkavage, St. John's College, Annapolis, 2016. 95-140.

The cosmological portion of the *Timaeus* consists of a likely story about how the cosmos comes to be as an ordered whole. Schelling first addresses Plato's grounding differentiation between the intelligible and the sensible. Plato writes:

> In my opinion, then, we must first distinguish the following. What is it that always is and has no beginning; and what is it that comes to be and never is? Now the one is grasped by intellection accompanied by a rational account, since it's always in the same condition; but the other in its turn is opined by opinion accompanied by irrational sensation, since it comes to be and perishes and never genuinely is.[25]

Influenced by the works of Plato commentors of his day,[26] Schelling connects Plato's distinction between the intelligible and the sensible to the notions taken from Kant and argues that the former, insofar as it is object of pure intellect, is relatable to "the ideas of pure understanding and pure reason," while the latter, insofar as it is presented as something heterogeneous to the self-same character of the former, to intuition and its objects.[27]

Following from his preliminary bridging between Plato and Kant, Schelling then proceeds to the question regarding the cause of the cosmos, for it is stated in the *Timaeus* that "everything that comes to be necessarily comes to be by some cause."[28] This leads to a discussion of how a demiurge constructed the cosmos by looking to the intelligible forms as a model. It has to be clarified that unlike the Christian God who creates *ex nihilo*, the role played by the demiurge is that of a craftsman, which means that the genesis of the cosmos in the *Timaeus* must be understood, at least initially, from the perspective of human production in which matter is given rather than created.[29] Schelling shows clear cognizance of this connection to human production as he writes that "the demiurgos had an ideal before his eyes" and that the "pre-existing original matter is presupposed."[30]

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[25] *Tim*. 27D-28A.
[26] Schelling mentions three commentators in the essay, they are: Friedrich Victor Lebrecht Plessing, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann and Dietrich Tiedemann. Among them, Tennemann's *System der Platonischen Philosophie* (1792-1795) and Plessing's *Versuche zue Aufklärung der Philosophie des ältesten Altherthums* (1788-1790) are the most relevant works for Schelling's interpretation.
[27] "*Timaeus (1794),"* 207.
[28] *Tim*. 28 A.
[29] For a discussion on the difference between the demigure and the Judeo-Christian God, as well as the role human production plays in this differentiation, see Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato Translated with a Running Commentary* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), pp. 159-177.
[30] "*Timaeus (1794),*" 213.

Just as a beautiful artifact requires a good design and skillfulness of the craftsman, the sensible cosmos is said to be fashioned after a perfect paradigm.[31] Furthermore, the cosmos is not simply a well-made artifact but "the most beautiful of things born."[32] This superlative character of the cosmos is qualified by the possession of the intellect, for Timaeus says the demiurge "discovered that of all things visible by nature, nothing unintelligent will ever be a more beautiful work, comparing wholes with wholes, than what has intellect."[33] The demand for intellect poses an immediate question for Schelling:

> He (Plato) could not possibly view the form of the world in its regularity and lawfulness as inherent in matter itself, nor as a form that was brought forth from matter. He must have held that this form of the world is in its essence something wholly other and distinct from all matter. Accordingly, he locates it in the intellect, and describes it as something to be grasped only by the understanding; and because he could find the cause of this connection between form (πέρας) and matter (ἄπειρον) neither in the one nor in the other alone, nor in both together (for he saw these [regularity and unruliness] as two things constantly striving against one another), therefore some third was necessary (see the *Philebus*) that unified each with the other, or, in other words, 'gave to the world a form,' which was an imitation of the original, pure form of the understanding.[34]

How could the intelligible principle interact or come into contact with the material, given the former is completely lawful and the latter completely unlawful? As indicated above, Schelling sees Plato rejecting the possibility of deriving lawfulness and regularity from matter, which means a strict materialist interpretation is not possible. On the other hand, due to the distance that separates Greek from Christian thinking, a theological interpretation that posits the existence of a transcendent creator is also denied. In lieu of this impasse, Schelling directs us to Plato's

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[31] Bruce Matthews devotes significant attention to Schelling's interpretation of beauty (τὸ καλὸν). "Schelling reads Plato's use of τὸ καλὸν as an ideal that demands completeness in creation, thereby requiring the uniting and integration of the seemingly dualistic domains of the intellectual and the sensual." See Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011), pp. 115-119.

[32] *Tim*. 29 A.

[33] *Tim*. 30 B.

[34] Ibid. 209.

trichotomic schema where a new element is introduced to solve the dichotomy between matter and the intelligible forms. This new element is the soul.[35]

The possibility of an intelligent cosmos comes down to the question of how matter can be shaped by the forms. The traditional answer to this question posits that matter must be purely passive in relation to formation. This passivity is concretely reflected in the supposition that materiality must have an unmoving substrate independent from its activity. But if this substrate were to be granted, then the dualism between matter and form is unavoidable. The question of materiality ushered in through the soul is of vital importance for understanding the progression of Schelling's philosophy of nature. In the *Timaeus Essay*, Schelling was still under the influence this substrate-based understanding of matter; this is most evident in his interpretation of the χώρα as "prime matter" (*Urstoff*) and "substance."[36] Yet, by the time of the composition of his first systematic work on the philosophy of nature, Schelling has become extremely critical of any substrate-based approach to materiality (see Chapter II).[37] While this change was influenced by his subsequent engagement with Fichte, its seed is planted precisely here, in his first engagement with the soul.

By "soul," Schelling is not thinking about a cosmic benevolent consciousness, instead, following Plato's presentation in the *Laws*, Schelling understands the soul in a naturalistic way as "the original principle of motion" (αρχη κινησεως), which pertains to the "principle of alteration" that orders the whole cosmos.[38] Schelling writes:

> Ψυχη is nothing but: the original principle of motion, αρχη κινησεως …Because Plato regarded matter as something wholly heterogeneous to divine being, something entirely

[35] Schelling interprets "beauty" and "perfection" in the sense of perfect lawfulness of the forms. On the one hand, perfect lawfulness seems to be an adequate model for phenomena such as the movement of the heavenly bodies. But on the other hand, we know from experience that the cosmos is also filled with contingent occurrences that do not appear regular or bounded by laws. This contradiction leads to three interpretive possibilities: the cosmos is either completely lawful, or completely unlawful, or lawful to a degree. The first possibility leads to necessarianism while the second to relativism, neither would have been appealing to Plato or Schelling. Schelling thus argues that Plato is interested in exploring a third way, a higher ground on which both necessity and contingency can be unified as aspects or expressions of a single whole.

[36] "*Timaeus*:1794," 226-229.

[37] To posit matter without substrate constitutes one of the central ideas of Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* (1797). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the founding of modern chemistry is a key contributing factor to this idea. Schelling writes: "The dynamical chemistry…admits no original matter whatever --- no matter, that is, from which everything else would have arisen by composition." See Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, tran. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 221.

[38] "Is there anything we can desiderate, anything further toward complete demonstration of the identity of soul with the primal becoming and movement of all that is, has been, or shall be, and of all their contraries, seeing it has disclosed itself as the universal cause of all change and motion?" *Laws*, 896a.

> contradictory to the pure form of lawfulness in divine understanding, he presupposed that the present world received nothing from God except form. Now, insofar as the form that God imparted to the world refers only to the form of the movement of world, the world must also have had its own original principle of motion, independently of God, which, as a principle that inheres in matter, contradicts all regularity and lawfulness, and is first brought within the bounds of lawfulness through the form (πέρας) that the divine understanding gave to it.[39]

Given the significance of the world-soul would have for Schelling a few years later in his career, his interpretation here requires careful analysis. To begin, I want to point out where his interpretation differs from the original text: in the *Timaeus*, it is stated that the world-soul was "constructed" since "it's impossible for intellect apart from soul to become present in anything."[40] There is no mentioning of the world having "its original own principle of motion" as Schelling claims. I argue Schelling most likely inferred this from 30a in the dialogue that reads:

> For since the god wanted all things to be good and, to the best his power, nothing to be shoddy, he thus took over all that was visible, and, since it didn't keep its peace but moved unmusically without order, he brought it into order from disorder…[41]

Now, insofar as motion is native to the cosmos even before it became a "cosmos" (in the sense of an ordered whole), it then makes sense to claim, as Schelling does, that "the present world received nothing from God except form." Another feature I want to point out in Schelling's interpretation is the relative dependency of the intellect on the soul. While the forms themselves are utterly independent and self-same, this absolute self-identity is also what prevents them from interacting with matter directly, which is why Timaeus says that the forms need the soul in order to come to present in beings. Schelling writes: "νοῦς is not the necessary condition of ψυχή, rather the reverse."[42]

Both points, I argue, are indicative of Schelling's lively sense of nature. His interpretation both gives matter more independence than the pure passivity to which materiality has been consigned,

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[39] "*Timaeus (1794),*" p. 210.
[40] *Tim.*30b.
[41] *Tim.* 30a.
[42] "*Timaeus (1794),*"

as well as takes away a significant degree of independence that has been usually attributed to the forms. As a result, the rigid opposition between matter and form is dissolved by their intimate cooperation through the soul (as Plato tells us, the soul is the "bond.").[43] Where Schelling's interpretation falls short however, rests on the question of organization. In his reading, even though matter is self-moving, it is not self-organizing --- a capacity that was only given to matter by God through the forms.[44] As we will see in Chapter IV, the issue of self-organization is key to Schelling's confrontation with Kant's third *Critique*.

Before I end, I want to identify two passages that proved to be vital to Schelling's later development. The first passage is located towards the end of Timaeus' discourse on νοῦς:

> For mixed indeed was the birth of this cosmos here, and begotten from a standing-together of necessity and intellect; and as intellect was ruling over necessity by persuading her to lead most of what comes to be toward what's best, in this way accordingly was this all constructed at the beginning: through necessity vanquished by thoughtful persuasion.[45]

According to Peter Kalkavage, the term "standing-together" (*systasis*) can refer to a political constitution either in the form of a pact or a conflict, meaning that the parties involved may either become joined as allies or separated as enemies.[46] The verbal *synistanai*, meaning "make stand together," is also the origin for our word "system." In both cases, it pertains to an *intimacy* by which the parties are differentiated precisely through their belonging together. More specifically, in this relation of bonding between intellect and necessity, even though the former takes the active role of persuading and leading, it never overtakes the latter but is instead reliant on it as a "principle of action." In other words, matter cannot be said to lack logos because only when something is able to hear or comprehend can it also be "persuaded."[47] Following from this, matter cannot be thought as the absolute absence of order or form but precisely signifies the

[43] *Tim.*31c.
[44] Schelling makes this point explicitly by writing 1) "matter by itself could not produce any zoa" and 2) "He (Plato) could not possibly view the form of the world in its regularity and lawfulness as inherent in matter itself."
[45] *Tim.* 48 A.
[46] See Peter Kalkavage's Glossary "construct" from *Timaeus*, 143.
[47] To take another example from everyday experience, even though a child is without knowledge, he is not therefore "ignorant," since his un-educated state is only the negative characterization of the positive capacity to learn.

potentiality or receptivity for it. This would become one of the textual sources for Schelling's conception of reciprocal causation.

The second passage comes from the so-called "chorology" of the *Timaeus*. In his discourse on necessity, Timaeus explicates the relationship among the forms, the receptacle, and the product of their interaction by comparing them to father, mother, and the offspring. Insofar as the offspring is that which comes to be, the father provides the formal pattern "from which" it sprouts while the mother constitutes the "in which" or the "wherein" such impression occurs. Among the three, it is the role of the mother that must be emphasized, since it is most akin to materiality due to its reception to form. The text states:

> If the imprints are going to be sufficiently various with every variety to be seen, then that in which the imprints are fixed wouldn't be prepared well unless it's shapeless with respect to all those looks that it might be going to receive from elsewhere. For if it were similar to any of the things that come on the scene, on receiving what was contrary to itself or of an altogether different nature, whenever these things arrive, it would copy them badly by projecting its own visage alongside the thing copied. For this reason, that which is to take up all the kinds within itself should be free of all forms…[48]

As indicated in this passage, the motherly receptacle is capable to receive all forms only insofar as it is "free of all forms." If the receptacle had a form, its reception would be biased or partial since it would project "its own visage" unto the things that enter into it. This freedom-from-determination is the necessary condition for phenomenalization, leading to the conclusion that only that which is by nature not limited by any definite form can assume any form whatsoever.[49] Although in the *Timaeus Essay,* Schelling has yet to realize the full significance of the formless mother, he makes a distinction between matter and the elements that precisely addresses the question of the indeterminable named above, he writes:

> Plato already claimed that the elements, insofar as they are visible, are to be wholly differentiated from the matter in which they are grounded and which as such never becomes visible, and that they are not properly matter itself, but rather forms, determinations of matter, which matter obtains externally. For the elements were

[48] *Tim,* 50 d-e.
[49] This determination will become crucial when we turn to Schelling's conception of nature as an equilibrium in Chapter 3.

> originally invisible because they had not yet acquired the form of the understanding (through which alone they are able to appear and become objects of experience). Next they obtained this form through the divine understanding, and precisely thereby became visible, but not, however, according to their ultimate empirical constitution, since once the elements appear to us, they also appear to us in the determinate and necessary forms of our intuition, not however as they were originally constituted in the ground, namely with neither this nor any necessary and determinate form.[50]

On the one hand, matter does not seem to be so different from the elements because it is what the elements *were* before they "acquired the form of the understanding." On the other hand, however, matter is to be sharply differentiated from the elements because it is the withdrawing necessary for the elements to appear as the elements: matter is what the elements *would be* if were possible to conceive them independently of their condition of appearing, i.e., according to their original constitution "in the ground." In a striking manner, Schelling has already realized that formlessness is the ground-zero of all things, but precisely for this reason, it must exist "somewhere."

Taken together, I argue that Schelling's interpretation of the soul, insofar as it contains a critique of the tradition's inability to conceive matter dynamically, constitutes the germination of a theory of materiality that seeks to undo the dualism between mind and matter. The central idea of this doctrine --- the inseparability between matter and power and the untenability of matter as a substrate --- later becomes one of the keystones to his philosophy of nature. In conclusion, I suggest that the young Schelling has intuitively grasped that matter must have a potentiality for the logos that is "de-formative" in nature; its very excessive character is the ground for a new determination just as every determination is itself a catalyst for further change. It is not an accident that when Schelling first encountered Fichte's work just a few months after the composition of the *Timaeus Essay*, he noticed a kindred thought in the latter that resonated with his own, namely, freedom as the first principle of philosophy. But precisely for this reason, it can be argued, as I do, that Schelling's thinking differed from Fichte from its very inception, since his journey toward the absolute began from nature.

[50] "*Timaeus (1794),*" p. 229.

1.2. "Kantianizing" Plato?

In the previous section, I have discussed Schelling's interpretation of the world-soul as the germination of a dynamical theory of matter. I now turn to another theme from the essay that is integral to understanding Schelling's later thinking, namely, natural organization. But rather than dealing with the concept from the perspective of natural philosophy proper, a task I shall undertake in subsequent chapters, the present section only offers a brief sketch of how the question of nature gets raised from within the interpretative horizon set by Plato and Kant.

To begin with, Schelling announces the basic hermeneutic principle of the entire essay as follows:

> The key to the explanation of the entirety of Platonic philosophy is noticing that Plato everywhere carries the subjective over to the objective. It is from this that the principle arose in Plato that the visible world is nothing but a copy of the invisible world…But no philosophy could have come from this principle, if the philosophical ground for it weren't already in us. This means, namely, insofar as the whole of nature, as it appears to us, is not only a product of our empirical receptivity, but is rather actually the work of our power of representation --- to the extent that this power contains within itself a pure and original foundational form (of nature) --- and insofar as the world belongs in representation to a power that is higher than mere sensibility and nature is exhibited as the stamp of a higher world which the pure laws of this world express.[51]

The key to understanding the above passage, as well as the essay as a whole, lies in the phrase "carrying over the subjective over to the objective." Interpreters have devoted significant attention to this formulation in order to anchor Schelling's early thought.[52] To unpack its meaning step by step, Schelling first presents what he considers to be Plato's basic philosophical thesis: the visible, empirical world is a copy of the intelligible world. He then excavates the transcendental standpoint that is hidden beneath this thesis by arguing that "no philosophy could

[51] Ibid. 212.

[52] John Sallis: "The passage is addressed to the way in which what is subjectively given to our empirical receptivity gets constituted as something objective, as something that is no longer merely relative to our sensibility. For Plato this objectivation takes place through the referral of the visible to the invisible; it occurs precisely insofar as the visible (the subjective) comes to be taken as an image --- as a mere image: *Nachbild* --- of the invisible (the objective)." See Sallis, *Chorology*, p. 160. For a detailed analysis of varying interpretations of this passage, see Lara Ostaric's dissertation, *Between Insight and Judgment: Kant's Conception of Genius and Its Fate in Early Schelling*, 2006, pp. 199-203.

have come from this principle, if the philosophical ground for it weren't already in us." Following from this, Schelling argues that the philosophical ground of Plato's thesis lies in "our power of representation" which contains a "foundational form of nature."

Schelling claims that nature is not a "product of our empirical receptivity" but the "work of our power of representation." The key word is "appearance," which is a clear allusion to Kant's position that the objective world is not something exiting independently from us but is co-constituted by the activities of the subject. Insofar as Plato argues that the natural world is grounded on a higher principle or an archetype, it is compatible with fundamental tenet of transcendental idealism. At the same time, however, the exhibition of this compatibility cannot occur at the expense of collapsing their differences, since Plato's cosmogony is an account of the emergence of actual things as conceived in the divine understanding while transcendental idealism is interested in the condition of possibility of experience imbedded in our own subjectivity. While this difference might not appear significant to the young Schelling at the time, it eventually led to two distinct yet related modes of inquiry: the Platonic, *Timaeus*-inspired path turned into the philosophy of nature, while his interest in critical philosophy transitioned into a transcendental philosophy of consciousness. In a way, the decisive question has already emerged: is nature a product of our power of representation or is our self-consciousness an outcome of nature's productivity?

1.3. The Logic of Production and the Experience of Birth

In his commentary on the *Timaeus*, John Sallis observes that there is a "tension" and "constant wavering" in Timaeus' cosmogony between a "discourse of production" and a "discourse of birth" (and "all that is linked with eros").[53] The present section aims to use the distinction between production and birth as a guiding thread to identify the early signs of a budding natural-philosophical sentiment in Schelling.

Without venturing too deep into Sallis' intricate analysis, I name the most apparent place where his proposed tension comes to the fore: the cosmic animal. On the one hand, the cosmos is clearly a life, an "animal having soul and intellect." But at the same time however, it is also an

[53] Sallis, *Chorology*, p.58.

artifact conceived in "the forethought of God" and produced, component by component, by a divine craftsman.[54]

In the *Timaeus Essay*, Schelling makes a direct connection between the idea of the cosmos as a living being and Kant's notion of natural end. He writes:

> We have to remember that Plato viewed the entire world as a ζῷον, that is, as an organized being, thus as a being whose parts are possible only through their relation to the whole, whose parts are reciprocally related against each other as means and end, and thus which reciprocally bring themselves forth according to both their form and connectedness.[55]

Furthermore, Schelling closely follows Kant's formulation of the reflective judgment in the third *Critique* and writes that "we must keep in mind that we, according to the subjective orientation of our power of knowing, simply cannot think the emergence of an organized being otherwise than through the causality of a concept or idea."[56] What Schelling is aiming for, through this verbatim reference to Kant, is to connect the "idea of the whole" that the demiurge beheld when making the cosmos with Kant's "intuitive understanding" that grasps the "unity" of the "manifold of forms in nature."[57]

To make this intention even more explicit, Schelling then immediately turns to the *Philebus* where Socrates offers a method of inquiry consisting of four inseparable components.[58] Seizing upon Socrates' claim that this fourfold method is a "gift of the gods" akin to the heavenly fire stolen by Prometheus,[59] Schelling relates this method to the form that the demiurge imparted to

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[54] "What Plato understands by ζῷον according to this passage is not difficult to judge. ζῷον, according to him, is what as such possesses an original power of movement (ψυχήν)." See "*Timaeus: 1794*," p. 211.
[55] "*Timaeus: 1794*," p. 213
[56] For Kant's formulation of natural end, see Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, tr. Paul Guyer and Eric Mathews (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.245 [5:373].
[57] Ibid.,67 [5:179].
[58] The four components are: 1) the unlimited (ἄπειρον), which covers all qualitative intensities or "everything that can become more or less"; 2) the limit (πέρας), which includes all quantitative relations such as "equal and equality," "double," and "every proportion of number to number"; 3) the mixture of the two (τὸ κοινόν); and 4) the cause (τὸ τῆς αἰτίας γένος) by which the unlimited is bound to the limit. The original passage from the Philebus reads: "The first class, then, is the indeterminate, the second the determinant, thirdly there is the sort of thing that is brought about as a mixture of these, and it would be in harmony with what we have said to call the fourth what is responsible for this mixture and generation." *Philebus*, 27b 7-10
[59] "There is a gift of the gods[…]which they let fall from their abode, and it was through Prometheus, or one like him, that it reached mankind, together with a fire exceeding bright. The men of old, who were better than ourselves and dwelt nearer the gods, passed on this gift in the form of a saying. All things…that are ever said to be consist of a one and a many, and have in their nature a conjunction of limit and unlimitedness. This then being the ordering of things we ought, they said, whatever it be

the "movement of the world" in fashioning the world soul as discussed in the last section.[60] He writes:

> The idea of the connection between the unity and the manifold, or the many, is the one dominant idea throughout all of Plato that he applies not only logically, but rather also as a natural concept… It is everywhere considered as one form that embraces of the whole of nature, and through its application upon formless matter not only are individual objects brought forth, but rather also the relation of objects to each other and their subordination to genera and kinds becomes possible.[61]

In relating the form of divine production to the form of inquiry, Schelling's *Timaeus Essay* seems like a one-track project gearing toward "Kantianizing" Plato. If this were the case, it would also mean that Schelling during this period has assumed a productionist/representationalist outlook on nature. While this interpretation certainly contains a significant degree of validity, especially given that Schelling then proceeds to relate the fourfold to Kant's categories of the understanding later in the text, I argue that it is not the full picture.

Returning to Schelling's original claim that nature is the "work of our power of representation," which clearly betrays the influence of Kant and Reinhold, his usage of "representation" is not simply operating under a normative epistemological framework. In a series of notes compiled prior to the *Timaeus Essay*, one significant entry is entitled "Types of Representation in the Ancient World concerning Various Objects, Collected from Homer, Plato, and Others."[62] The phenomena that are covered in the text --- poetry, theopneusty, prophecy, and soothsaying --- are all considered by Schelling as "types of representation" (*Vorstellungsarten*). Furthermore, the central concern of this entry is precisely the divine origin of knowledge as exemplified in these activities. As it will soon become apparent, Schelling's extensive comparison between the poetic

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that we are dealing with, to assume a single form and search for it[…]There then, that is how the gods, as I told you, have committed to us the task of inquiry, of learning, and of teaching." *Philebus*, 16 c -d. *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 1092.

[60] According to this schema, the unruly matter in the *Timaeus* is ἄπειρον in relation to the self-same forms (πέρας, exemplified by mathematical ratios); the physical cosmos is the result of mixing between ἄπειρον and πέρας; and the soul, as the principle of becoming, is the counterpart of the cause. Furthermore, any individual being or state of affairs would fall under the category of mixture, while its coming into being, or the mixing itself, can be conceived as a passage from potency to activity, i.e., actualization or production.

[61] "*Timaeus*: 1794," p. 215.

[62] Quotations from text are taken from "*Schelling's Plato Notebooks*: 1792 – 1794," trans. Naomi Fisher.

act in the *Ion* with the genesis of the cosmos in the *Timaeus* will cast a different light on the inception of Schelling's idealism.

To begin with, why does this entry matter? It matters because the same fourfold "method" that was used in the *Timaeus Essay* to establish the link with Kant's categories is employed here to describe processes that are much more akin to the experience of birth and eros.

Secondly, Schelling explicitly argues that poesis is not a τέχνη but functions through the transference of "divine power" (θείαν δύναμις).[63] If the fourfold were nothing but a form or a blueprint of existence similar to the idea of a wardrobe in the mind of a carpenter, then the cosmos would become a technical product, entailing mechanism as the mode of inquiry that is most appropriate to it. But as our forgoing analysis has made clear, the cosmos for Schelling is in no way reducible to a machine but is instead a living being. In other words, whereas Schelling's *Timaeus Essay* at times veers towards a productionist conception of nature by virtue of its appeal to Kant, I argue Schelling's reading of poesis betrays a different way of approaching nature that is less-representationalist and more dynamic and processual, namely, a participatory mode of "knowing" in which the subject is "carried out of oneself" by the experience of a certain kinship with the natural world.

In the *Vorstellungsarten* entry, Schelling likens the poesis to the genesis of the cosmos because they both involve "the bringing forth of a world out of chaos." Like the demiurge who was confronted with a pregenetic existence "moving without order," the poet is similarly working with an "overflowing abundance of representations and sensations." [64] In this chaos, the finished product is present but only as ἄπειρον, which Schelling compares to an opaque yet immeasurable darkness. In order for there to be a word or a line through which the poem may unfold, a certain

[63] Lara Ostaric points out that Schelling intentionally misinterprets Plato on the relationship between poetic inspiration and knowledge: whereas Plato clearly critiques the poets for their lack of knowledge both regarding the things they speak about in their poems as well as their own artistic process, Schelling argues that such lack precisely belongs to the very nature of poesis since inspiration is not a τέχνη but a transference of "divine power" (θείαν δύναμις). See Ostaric, *Between Insight and Judgment*, pp.178-183.

[64] "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 cause and effects, and which the common person cannot think at all." "Schelling's Plato Notebooks," p. 114.

measure or πέρας must be introduced into darkness of ἄπειρον as "a higher stream of light."[65] Offering an "explanation" of how poesis occurs, Schelling writes:

> This phenomenon cannot be explained in any way other than the following: that the soul, without being conscious of it, labored on in silence, and gradually advanced from sentence to sentence, from conclusion to conclusion, connected sentences, divided sentences, until it finally and suddenly encountered that long and vainly sought sentence, and found it now in the clearest connection with other sentences and linked to a completely correct progressing chain of conclusions.[66]

The laboring of the soul is "silent" because it is not conscious. Schelling writes: "Characteristic poetic power operates according to laws, of which the poet himself is not distinctly conscious, and which for others are even less cognizable."[67] At the same time however, this operation is also *not* unconscious as the poet is actively trying to bring forth something determinate. To appropriate a phrase that Schelling would later use to describe the "becoming of new matter" in chemical motion, poesis is "positive and negative at the same time,"[68] meaning what distinguishes the poetic act is precisely the *passage* from the unconscious into the conscious, or the experience of birth from darkness into the light. This poetic passage would later characterize the trajectory of his philosophy of nature as the retrieve or the reconstruction of nature as spirit.

In essence, I argue that Schelling's account of poetic inspiration depicts an experience of what the coming to be of the cosmos must be like, if it were indeed possible to cast it in human terms. To anticipate my analysis in the coming chapters, many of the themes that have appeared in the present chapter --- the cosmological and the anthropological, production and birth, materiality

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[65] "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 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." Ibid. p. 115.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid. p. 114.

[68] "We affirm that matter itself is only a product of antithetical forces; when these reach equilibrium in matter, all motion is either positive (repulsion) or negative (attraction); only when that equilibrium is disrupted, is motion positive and negative at the same time and there arises an interaction of the two original forces." Schelling, *On the World Soul* (forthcoming). Translation is taken from Iain Hamilton Grant's manuscript.

and power --- would reassert themselves in different ways, but never trail so far from their native soil: the *Timaeus*.[69]

Chapter II. The Absolute as the Unconditionable

The present chapter explores two of Schelling's early essays: *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy* (Hereinafter *Ich-schrift*) and *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (Hereinafter *Philosophical Letters*). Composed not long after the *Timaeus Essay*, these two works are generally considered to be representative of Schelling's so-called Fichtean phase. Like many of his contemporaries, Schelling's early philosophical horizon was set by the advent and reception of Kant's critical philosophy. This horizon is defined by two essential tasks: identifying the shortcomings in Kant's work and realizing its latent possibilities. For Fichte, Schelling, and others, Kant's emphasis on cognition in the first *Critique* has limited knowledge to conditioned beings, namely, beings that depend on other beings for their existence. They perceived this delimitation of theoretical reason to be vulnerable to skepticism since there lacked a positive term upon which our knowledge can be grounded.[70] They sought this positive term in what synthesis must presuppose in order to be a synthesis at all: a prior whole or unity that the process of synthesizing attempts to recuperate. Schelling calls the recovery of this prior unity the "very purpose of all synthesis" and "task of all philosophy in general."[71] Furthermore, insofar as synthesis is structured by the division between subject and object, these idealists saw the elimination of this divide in the absolute as the indispensable condition for securing the spirit of Kant's thinking.[72]

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[69] It should be mentioned that the pairing between ἄπειρον and πέρας, as well as the fourfold method of inquiry as presented in the *Philebus* are crucial as well.

[70] For a discussion on Schelling and skepticism, see Michael N. Forster, "Schelling and Skepticism," in *Interpreting Schelling: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp.32-47.

[71] Schelling, "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism," in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Essays (1794-1796)*, tr. and ed., Fritz Marti (Cranbury, Associated University Press, 1980), p. 164 [296, 297].

[72] Schelling thus translates Kant's guiding question in the First *Critique* "how are synthetic judgment a priori possible?" into "how the absolute could come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?" Ibid.174 [310].

In these two essays mentioned, Schelling consistently employs the comparison between dogmatism and criticism as a way of presenting his interpretation of the absolute. In my analysis, I will use Schelling's comparison in these essays as a way of tracking how his interpretation of the absolute differed from that of Fichte. This difference precisely rests on the question of nature: whereas Fichte treats nature as a secondary term, a check that limits the I, Schelling argues that the I and the not-I are co-originary.

Lastly, I argue that *Philosophical Letters* anticipates the vantage point Schelling would eventually arrive at in his *Freedom Essay*, namely, a system of the absolute *should* entail a system of freedom; Spinozism is a system of the absolute but failed as a system of freedom (one-sided realism) while Fichteanism is a system of freedom but not a system of the absolute (one-sided idealism).

2.1. Dogmatism and Criticism in the *Ich-Schrift*

In the *Ich-Schrift,* Schelling presents the difference between dogmatism and criticism through their respective ontological principles:

> The principle of dogmatism is a not-I posited as antecedent to any I; the principle of criticism, an I posited as antecedent to all [that is] not-I and as exclusive of any not-I. Halfway between the two lies the principle of an I conditioned by a not-I or, what amounts to the same, of a not-I conditioned by an I.[73]

As stated in this passage, Schelling names three possibilities of thinking the absolute: 1) dogmatism, grounded on the not-I; 2) criticism, grounded on the I, and 3) incomplete criticism, which is founded on the empirical I or an I that is conditioned by the not-I. Among the three, Schelling endorses criticism while rejecting dogmatism and incomplete criticism, meaning that he would rule out the not-I and the empirical I as possible candidates for the absolute. I will first trace Schelling's reasons for elimination before delving into his positive account of the absolute I.

[73] "Of the I," p.77 [170-171].

Starting with dogmatism, which is a system that posits "a not-I as antecedent to any I." Schelling argues that this fundamental principle contradicts itself because it "presupposes an unconditional thing (*ein unbedingtes Ding*)."[74] To unpack his reason, Schelling thinks that objects or things in general are characterized by a constitutive negativity that is fundamentally inimical to the possibility of knowledge. This negativity is rooted in the fact that an object can never stand or exist by itself without the chain of cause and effect that gives rise to it. Consequently, if an object always refers to another object or a prior causal condition, then the very identity requisite for knowing would be impossible, since the identity of A is constituted by its not being B, C, D….,[75] Schelling thus writes:

> Knowledge which I can reach only through other knowledge is conditional. The chain of our knowledge goes from one conditional [piece of] knowledge to another. Either the whole has no stability, or one must be able to believe that this can go on *ad infinitum*, or else that there must be an ultimate point on which the whole depends. The latter, however, in regard to the principle of the principle of its being, must be the direct opposite of all that falls in the sphere of the conditional, that is, it must be not only unconditional but altogether unconditionable.[76]

As stated in the passage, if an object is always determined by something other than itself, then our knowledge of objects would be condemned to an infinite regression. To ensure the reality of knowledge --- not only that we know something, but what we know is true --- there must be a positive term that grounds all conditioned beings. Furthermore, that which grounds conditionality cannot itself be something conditional, therefore it must be unconditional, that is, not determined by another term but determining itself in an originary and inceptual manner, that is, it must be a *causa sui*. Schelling calls this unconditional principle the absolute I.

Having clarified the non-objective character of the absolute, the question remains as to why Schelling would associate the not-I or the objective with dogmatism in the first place. For

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[74] "The principle of dogmatism contradicts itself, because it presupposes an unconditional thing (*ein unbedingtes Ding*) that is, a thing that is not a thing. In dogmatism therefore, consistency…attains nothing other than that which is not-I should become I, and that which is I should become not-I." Ibid.

[75] Andrew Bowie writes: "Each object is part of a chain of ob-jects (*Gegen-stände*), which 'stand against' each other. Objects, then, are not absolutely real because they only become themselves by not being other objects." See Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (London, Routledge, 1993), p.20.

[76] "Of the I," p.72 [163-164].

Schelling, the ultimate form of dogmatism is Spinozism, which sets up substance as the basis of all reality. Schelling understands Substance as a not-I because it is something that exists independently of the subject. Schelling rejects this possibility because for him an object is only an object when it is cast in relation to a subject.

For Schelling, one of the fatal flaws of Spinozist substance is its inability to provide a viable grounding for consciousness: if the not-I or something that exists independently of I were posited as the absolute, then everything subjective is immediately reduced to it, meaning that all mental activities are nothing but the effects of external things.[77] If all mental events are ultimately material or physical events, then not only the activity but the reality of mind is annulled. This problem is best reflected in Spinoza's reduction of all causations to mechanical causation. If mechanical causation were the only kind of causality operative in the world, then spontaneity (or what Schelling calls 'causality by freedom') would be a mere illusion. Furthermore, once freedom is eliminated, so goes morality insofar as the latter presupposes spontaneity as the indispensable condition for realizing moral worth. To conclude, Schelling's objection against dogmatism rests on the assumption that the principles of mind, consciousness, and most importantly freedom are irreducible to things, which entails that the absolute cannot be constructed from a principle (the not-I) that excludes them or render them merely phenomenal from the ground up.

Having delineated why dogmatism is eliminated from the contest for the absolute, I now turn to the second candidate: the empirical I of incomplete criticism. As already stated, by "non-objective" Schelling does not only mean what is not an object, but what can never become determined or objectified; the empirical subject, even though it is formally not an object, is disqualified from the absolute for the same reason: it is determined by the object just as the object is determined by *it*. The distinguishing mark of the empirical I is the "I think," Schelling writes: "It manifests itself not by a mere I am, but by I think, which means that it is, not by its

[77] Schelling's interpretation of the relationship between dogmatism and criticism is indebted to Fichte. Regarding the latter's understanding of Spinozism, Frederick Neuhouser writes: "Such a system, on Fichte's view, is obligated to understand all of the features of consciousness as effects of the actions of external things upon the subject. Thus, even the subject's seemingly free choices must be explained as resulting in some complex way from causal determination by things rather than as instances of genuine self-determination. The strategy of idealism, in contrast, is to begin with what it regards as the essential nature of the subject --- the 'self-sufficiency of the I' --- and upon this basis to explain all of experience, including the necessary features of the objective world." See Frederick Neuhouser, *Fichte's Theory of Subjectivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 55-56.

own sheer being, but by thinking something, thinking objects."[78] Following from this, the empirical I exists only insofar as it thinks objects; once the objects are taken away, it too will perish, which is another way of saying that as long as the empirical subject is posited, the objects must be posited along with it. The ontological dependency of the empirical I on objects betrays the weakness of incomplete criticism, namely, dualism.[79] If there were no absolute, then the opposition between subject and object would become the final terms;[80] this consequence is equally unacceptable as the dogmatist denial of the I since it makes permanent the division between subject and object, while it is precisely this division that has to be bridged in order for genuine knowledge to be possible.

In the forgoing analysis, it has been made clear the dogmatism and incomplete criticism are eliminated from the contest for the absolute for two reasons: firstly, while both lay claim to the absolute, their founding principles (not-I and empirical I) in fact reciprocally condition each other in the sense that each requires the other in order to be thought. This dependency on the other is what excludes both from becoming the absolute, since the absolute can never be thought through another but must be "thinkable only through itself" as the perfect unity between being and thinking.[81] Secondly, following from their ontological partiality, the not-I cannot be the absolute because it structurally denies the possibility of freedom as something independent from mechanistic causation while the empirical I is also unviable due to its dualism. If neither determinism nor dualism is permitted, then the only possibility left is the principle of criticism, which must be based on a principle that does not ontologically exclude freedom.[82]

[78] "Of the I," 85 [182].

[79] Schelling calls this criticism "incomplete" because he precisely sees Kant's *First Critique* and its formulation of theoretical reason as having retained the dualism between subject and object by positing a thing in itself, which is for Schelling an absolute object.

[80] Schelling writes: "For if there were no absolute I, then the concept of subject, that is, the concept the I which is conditioned by an object, would be ultimate." Schelling, "Of the I," p.76 [169].

[81] "Of the I," p.72 [163-164].

[82] It is only when viewed under these two demands --- monism as form and freedom as content ---do we understand why Schelling wants to "annul explicitly the very foundation of Spinoza's system" as stated in the preface to the *Ich-Schrift*, since Spinozism is for him precisely a monistic system that falls short in accommodating freedom.

2.2. Leveling the Playing-field: *Philosophical Letters*

In the previous section, I have traced Schelling's conception of the absolute as the non-objective through the contrast between dogmatism and criticism. I now turn to Schelling's *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (1795).[83]

The *Philosophical Letters* originally arose out of Schelling's disagreement with a group of Tubingen theologians who sought to appropriate Kant's practical philosophy to support their theological agendas. Quick to seize upon Kant's well-known expression that it is "necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith,"[84] proponents of this new dogmatism argue that the very division between theoretical and practical reason in Kant suggests that what was impossible for theoretical reason to grasp, namely the existence of God, can be reintroduced into philosophy through practical demands issuing from the necessity of the moral laws.

Schelling takes issue with this view because it threatens to send thinking back into the ditch of heteronomy Kant's critical philosophy has struggled hard to leave behind. For Kant, a transcendent God is not only theoretically illicit but would practically ruin the very possibility of morality: If God exists, then conformity to divine laws would be our only option; no moral worth could possibly be derived from this conformity as it has taken away the very core of moral action: the capacity for self-determination in accordance with reason alone. For Kant then, God is a rational postulate necessitated by the structure of practical reason.

Under this light, these new dogmatists are not Kantians at all, but dogmatists in Kantian clothing; as they find in Kant the most convenient corroboration for their ideas, namely that insofar as theoretical reason is too weak to know God, there is, they argue, a necessity for revelation as a more superior and therefore commanding mode of knowing. From Schelling's perspective, this amounts to "letting in by the back door what has been evicted by the front door," since rather than asking what new ethical possibilities are opened through Kant, they want reason to once

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[83] For interpretations of the *Philosophical Letters*, see Lara Ostaric, "Nature as the World of Action, Not of Speculation: Schelling's Critique of Kant's Postulates in His Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" in *Schelling's Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*, ed. G Anthony Bruno (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020), pp.11-31. Bruno, G. Anthony, "Schelling's Philosophical Letters on Doctrine and Critique" in *Critique in German Philosophy: From Kant to Critical Theory*, ed. María Del Del Rosario Acosta López and Colin McQuillan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020), pp. 133-154. Frederick C. Beiser, German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism: 1781-1801 (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 476-79.

[84] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr.and ed.Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 117 [B xxx].

again succumb, under a practical pretext, ideas that are most inimical to it, namely, conformity to convention, blind adherence to religious authority, and acquiescence toward the *status quo*.

The resurgence of this new dogmatism, allegedly derived from Kant's teachings, indicates to Schelling that the spirit of Kant has yet to be grasped. Against interpretations that argue the first *Critique* has successfully demolished dogmatism and definitively established criticism, Schelling argues that firstly, the first *Critique* has not defeated dogmatism but only "dogmaticism." Secondly, the *First Critique* has not established criticism once and for all, because there is a gap between theoretical and practical reason. Regarding the first point, "dogmaticism" pertains to the dogmatism of the pseudo-Kantians aforementioned while dogmatism proper, the one that the first *Critique* has not defeated, pertains to the "systemic realism" of Spinoza and Leibniz. For Schelling, the deadlock between dogmatism and criticism cannot last forever because they were generated from the same source, which means their oppositionality is rooted in a deeper relatedness. [85] Schelling locates the intimacy between them through a common motion which he calls the "egress from the absolute."[86]

The trace of this egress can be found in the impulse to fulfill the conditionality of synthesis within theoretical reason itself, as Kant has stated that it belongs to the very nature of reason to seek the unconditioned. But this is impossible insofar as theoretical reason seeks to know the unconditioned as an object of knowledge. Thus as far as theoretical reason is concerned, there are only two possibilities: either the object is posited as the absolute, in which case everything subjective would be derivative, or the subject is posited as the absolute, in which case everything objective would have to be done away with. Schelling writes: "One of the two must come to pass. Either no subject and an absolute object, or no object and an absolute subject. How can we end this controversy?"[87]

Consistent with his critique in the *Ich-Schrift*, Schelling argues that insofar as theoretical reason is structured by the subject-object divide, this controversy is irresolvable. The only way out is to cut the Gordian knot: "Reason itself would have to create a new realm where its knowledge

[85] "They are opposed to each other in their first principle but they must meet at some common point some time or other. No line of distinction could be drawn between different systems except in a field they had in common." Schelling, "Philosophical Letters," p.163.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Schelling, "Philosophical Letters," p.167 [299, 300].

ceases, that is, from a merely cognitive it would have to turn into a creative reason [*realisierende Verkunft*], from theoretical reason into practical."[88] Theoretical reason necessarily seeks the unconditioned, but it can never find the unconditioned as an object of knowledge (since knowing presupposes determination which is precisely what the absolute, as unconditionable, cannot be), it therefore must "demand the act through which it (the unconditioned) ought to be realized."[89]

With Schelling's proposal of a creative reason, the basic movement of philosophy, hitherto centered on the primacy of the theoretical, is reversed: rather than retroactively accounting for the transition from the infinite to the finite, philosophy must *enact* the transition from the finite to the infinite.[90] This reversal would be impossible unless the practical displaces the theoretical as the dominant paradigm of reason. With this move, the guiding question of philosophy is no longer about knowing the world but what kind of world one ought to live in and realize. Consequently, the contest between dogmatism and criticism is no longer centered on which of the two has a better theoretical system, but which is more capable of bringing about a world that would give reality to their respective propositions.

As soon as the arena is shifted from the theoretical to the practical, the contest between dogmatism and criticism begins again. Practically speaking, both dogmatism and criticism constitute a way of realizing the absolute in the sense that both systems are trying to eliminate the conditionality associated with the subject-object divide that plagues theoretical reason. Contrary to thinkers who thought the practical postulate as a unique invention of criticism, Schelling argues that dogmatism too is inherently informed by a practical impulse, meaning that it wants to leave behind the subject-object divide through action. What kind of praxis does dogmatism teach? How would criticism fare against dogmatism in the practical register?

2.2.1. Thinking through *Schwärmerei*

In the previous sections, I have examined Schelling's understanding of the absolute by using the opposition between dogmatism and criticism as a guiding thread. Placing the two essays side by

[88] Ibid.175 [311].
[89] Ibid.
[90] "Philosophy cannot make a transition from the non-finite to the finite, but it can make one from the finite to the nonfinite." Ibid. 178 [315-16].

side, Schelling's perspective on dogmatism has significantly shifted by the time he composed the *Philosophical Letters*. In the *Ich-Schrift*, Schelling's diagnosis of dogmatism clearly is mainly negative, for Schelling argues that insofar as dogmatism is based on the "denial of the absolute I," it "nullifies not only a specific philosophy but all philosophy."[91] In the *Philosophical Letters* however, Schelling no longer insists on the absolute as an I but only the absolute as such. Consequently, by toning down the primacy of the I in the absolute, both dogmatism and criticism were placed on an equal footing theoretically. One of the key factors that contributed to this equalization between dogmatism and criticism is the notion of *Schwärmerei*.

The most extensive treatment of *Schwärmerei* occurs in the Eighth Letter. In its opening passage, Schelling posits that he has touched on the "very core of all possible *Schwärmerei*" when examining the ethical principle of dogmatism. He then explains why that is the case by viewing dogmatism under the light of intellectual intuition. Regarding the latter, Schelling writes:

> This intellectual intuition takes place whenever I cease to be an object for myself, when --- withdrawn into itself --- the intuiting subject is identical with the intuited. In this moment of intuition, time and duration vanish for us; it is not we who are in time, but time is in us; in fact it is not time but rather pure absolute eternity that is in ourselves. It is not we who are lost in the intuition of the objective world; it is the world that is lost in our intuition.[92]

As stated, intellectual intuition is an experience of myself not as a personal self, which, according to Kant, is mere appearance, but an experience of freedom that makes empirical consciousness possible. For Schelling, it is precisely this experience of freedom that Spinoza has objectified. Schelling writes:

> When he intuited the intellectual in himself [*das Intellektuale in sich*], the absolute was no longer an object for him. This was an experience which admitted of two interpretations; either he had become identical with the absolute, or else the absolute had become identical with him. In the latter case, intellectual intuition was intuition of self; in

[91] Schelling, "Of the I," p.102 [205-06].
[92] Ibid.,181 [319-20].

> the former, intuition of an absolute object. This latter is what Spinoza preferred. He believed himself identical with the absolute object, and lost in its nonfiniteness.[93]

One must approach Schelling's diagnosis of Spinozism as presented in this passage in a twofold manner in terms of what is illuminating and what is deficient. On the one hand, insofar all philosophy (of the absolute) seek to do away with the dualism between the infinite and the finite, the subject and the object, Spinozism indeed presents a viable path of ending this divide by conceiving all finite beings as modifications of the infinite. In other words, if the impasse of theoretical reason lies in the inability to account for the transition from the infinite to the finite, then by considering the difference between the two as one of degrees rather than kind, Spinozism has done away with the need for this transition.

Yet, even though Schelling acknowledges Spinoza's effort at ending the dualism between subject and object, he takes issue with *how* Spinoza ends it. As stated in the previous sections, the absolute by itself is unconditionable; it is that through which the subject and object comes to be, which means it, by itself, cannot be either. Schelling's main objection to Spinozism has to do with Spinoza's objectification of absolute freedom as well as the practical consequence that follows: if the absolute or the infinite were something independent from the subject, then in order to become identified with it, a finite being must gradually shed off the limitations that set it apart from the infinite. The only way for a subject to do this is to renounce its own agency as it approximates an eternal and unchanging order.

Schelling argues that this de-subjectivating approach is rooted in Spinoza's unwillingness to grant the subject any kind of causality independent from the absolute causality of substance. The ethical demand of a dogmatic subject is to annihilate oneself and become completely passive toward absolute causality.[94] In other words, in Spinoza's system, the subject is a problem that must be eliminated because it was never conceived as an integral aspect of the absolute to begin with. In other words, even though Spinozism is a philosophy of the absolute, it has not entered the hermeneutic circle in the right way and therefore failed at becoming a philosophy of freedom.

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Note that here, even though the passive-active distinction is vital to Spinoza, Schelling is either dismissing this distinction entirely or implicitly arguing that Spinoza's active power is still a form of passivity.

Similar to dogmatism, criticism too must practically obliterate the subject-object divide. But its approach is different. Rather than reducing the subject, criticism seeks to expand the subjective domain through an interaction with the objective world. Schelling summarizes the difference between these two approaches in the following way:

> In dogmatism my vocation [*Bestimmung*] is to annihilate all free causality in me; to let absolute causality act in me, but not to act myself; to narrow more and more the limits of my freedom in order more and more to widen those of the objective world; in short, my destiny is the utmost unlimited passivity. While dogmatism solves the theoretical conflict between subject and object by demanding that the subject ceases to be subject for the absolute object, that is, that it ceases to be something opposed to it, criticism on the other hand must solve the conflict of theoretical philosophy by the practical demand that the absolute ceases to be object for me. This demand I can fulfill only through an infinite striving toward the realization of the absolute in myself, only through unlimited activity.[95]

Schelling presents the difference between dogmatism and criticism in terms of activity and passivity and the inverted ratio between the subjective and the objective. For dogmatism, the more passive the empirical subject becomes, the more active the absolute causality could act through me. For criticism on the other hand, it is the subject that must become more active by mastering the objective. Under this light, while both are aiming to end the subject-object divide, dogmatism does so by eliminating the subjective pole whereas criticism requires the subject realizing itself through its interaction with the objective.

In the *Ich-Schrift,* Schelling wanted to emphasize the absolute I as the original ground of all reality. But under the influence of Hölderlin, Schelling came to the realization that just as the absolute cannot be objectified as in Spinozism, it also cannot be "subjectified" as in Fichteanism.[96] Rather than treating dogmatism as the sole representative of *Schwärmerei*, a position Schelling seemed to be committed to in the *Ich-Schrift*, Schelling argues, in the *Philosophical Letters*, that criticism too can become fanatic:

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[95] Ibid.,192 [336].

[96] For a discussion on Hölderlin's influence on Schelling, see Beiser, *German Idealism*, pp.476-78.

> If dogmatism demands that I vanish in the absolute object, then criticism must demand, on the contrary, that everything called object shall vanish in the intellectual intuition of myself. In either case, every object is lost for me, and therewith also the consciousness of myself as subject. My reality vanishes in the infinite reality.[97]

This leads him to emphasize the objective pole as indispensable aspect to the disclosure of the absolute, a shift that is best demonstrated in the following contrast: in the *Ich-Schrift*, Schelling writes that "Self-awareness implies the danger of losing the I,"[98] but in the *Philosophical Letters*, he says that "as long as intuition is intent upon objects, that is, as long as it is sensuous intuition, there is no danger of losing oneself."[99] Note the drastic change of emphasis, Schelling's understanding of sensuousness goes from a fatal hindrance to our realization of the absolute I to the indispensable condition for its disclosure. It is precisely at this juncture that his investigation into Plato's *Timaeus* becomes visible: the "standing-together" [σύστασις] of νοῦς and ἀνάγκη precisely entails that a cosmology or a system of nature cannot be constructed from the self-identity of the intellect alone but requires resistance.[100] Schelling writes:

> With absolute freedom no consciousness of self is compatible. An activity without any object, an activity to which there is no resistance, never returns into itself. Only through a return to one's self does consciousness arise. Only a restricted reality [*Realität*] is an actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] for us.[101]

As indicated in this passage, self-consciousness comes into being only when there is a return to oneself occasioned by the resistance from an object. "Where all resistance ceases," Schelling writes, "there is infinite expansion. But the intensity of our consciousness is in inverse ratio to the extension of our being."[102] Taken by itself, the self-activity of intellectual intuition is an

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[97] Schelling, "Philosophical Letters," p.186 [327].
[98] "You insist that you should be conscious of this freedom? But are you bearing in mind that all your consciousness is possible only through this freedom, and that the condition cannot be contained in the conditioned? Are you considering in any way that the I is no longer the pure, absolute I once it occurs in consciousness; that there can be no object at all for the absolute I; and, moreover, that the absolute I never can become an object? Self-awareness implies the danger of losing the I." Schelling, "Of the I," p. 84 [180-181].
[99] Ibid.,185 [325-326].
[100] Daniele Fulvi argues that the concept of resistance is crucial to understanding Schelling's account of freedom. See Fulvi, "Freedom as a Matter of Resistance in the Philosophy of Schelling," in Critical Horizons 23 (1):78-92.
[101] Ibid.,184 [324].
[102] Ibid.,185 [325-26].

expansion that approximates "annihilation" and "absolute repose" because "where sensuous intuition ceases…everything objective vanishes."[103]

For Schelling, all philosophy of the absolute *should* at the same time yield a system of freedom. What's unique about Spinozism is that even though it is a philosophy of absolute, it did not yield a system of freedom. Conversely, while Fichteanism is a system of freedom, it has failed to be a system of the absolute because it has made the absolute into an I, which is also a form of conditioning the unconditionable similar to Spinozism. The key to understanding their respective shortcomings lies in the mode of the being of the absolute, which is also where the issue of *Schwärmerei* becomes decisive:

> Dogmatism and criticism can hold their own as contradicting systems only while approaching the ultimate goal. On this very account, criticism must regard the ultimate goal merely as the object of an endless task. Criticism itself necessarily turns into dogmatism as soon as it sets up the ultimate goal as realized (in a object), or realizable (any particular time).[104]

What this passage accentuates is precisely how to remain attuned to the absolute in the very act of thinking it, a mode of thinking Schelling calls *Begeisterung*.[105] Schelling: "The absolute, if represented as realized (as existing), becomes objective; it becomes an object of knowledge and therewith ceases to be an object of freedom."[106] The absolute would cease to be the absolute the moment it becomes realized or existing. This is indicative of the absolute's *mode of being* as potential rather than actual or fully realized. I therefore argue that Schelling's proposal for the transition from theoretical into creative reason, the absolute as an "object of knowledge" to an "object of freedom," lies precisely in the construal of being as potential or freedom as the capacity to be. This potentiality is evident in the primacy of method over system as well as the incomplete character of all systems as discussed in the previous section.

To bring my analysis to a close, the crux of Schelling's contrast between dogmatism and criticism lies not reinstating their opposition but in disclosing their intimacy. Schelling's notion

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[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.,189 [331-332]
[105] For a detailed discussion of the distinction between *Schwärmerei* and *Begeisterung*, see Ostaric, *Between Insight and Judgment,* pp.178-183.
[106] Ibid.

of creative reason calls for a kind of thinking that retains the absolute's non-objective, that is, indeterminate, character in the same act as it becomes disclosed. Freedom can never be an object that one may theorize about from an external perspective. Instead, it is something that must be enacted in the very movement of philosophical thought. Precisely for this reason then, one should neither completely give up one's subjectivity and succumb before an objective, eternally self-same order like a Spinozist nor should one impose one's moral vision over nature, to be a master of the cosmos as Fichteanism, at times, suggests. Returning to Schelling's initial formulation of the absolute, it is not simply the unconditioned, but the *unconditionable* --- Is there an experience that speaks of this?

2.2.2. The Tragic Remainder

In the culminating section of the *Philosophical Letters,* Schelling turns to Greek tragedy and asks how "Greek reason" could bear the "contradictions" that its sublime art expresses: "A mortal, destined by fate to become a malefactor and himself fighting against this fate, is the nevertheless appallingly punished for the crime, although it was the deed of destiny!"[107] Why should the hero be punished if his deeds were determined by fate? Schelling argues that the ground of this contradiction lay in the "contest" between "human freedom and the power of the objective world," the very antagonism that runs throughout his *Philosophical Letters*. Schelling writes:

> It was a sublime thought, to suffer punishment willingly even for an inevitable crime, and so to prove one's freedom by the very loss of this freedom, and to go down with a declaration of free will.[108]

To prepare for the coming section, which will be dealing with Schelling's philosophy of nature proper, note the structure of disclosure that Schelling highlights in the above passage: it is the experience of necessity or the inevitable that discloses the resilience of freedom; in succumbing to fate and losing one's freedom to the "objective world," one precisely encounters freedom *as*

[107] Ibid., 192 [336].
[108] Ibid., 193 [337-38].

freedom. In other words, our passivity in relation to nature's powers precisely announces a deeper activity, even belonging, towards it.[109]

Chapter III. Transition into Philosophy of Nature

The presents chapter is an investigation into Schelling's first systematic work on the philosophy of Nature entitled *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. What structures my interpretation of this crucial text is Schelling's account of the origination and task of philosophy and the ways in which his philosophy of nature overcome the twofold consequence of the predominance of reflection: the making-permanent of the separation between nature and human beings and the self-alienation of human beings from within. Schelling argues that the subject-object divide not only inexorably bars us from cultivating a genuine relationship to nature but also causes an irreparable fracture within ourselves. I argue that it is only when contextualized by the overcoming of these twofold separation does the full ethical potential of Schelling's philosophy of nature come to light.

I will first present a brief account of Kant's dynamics with a special emphasis on how it differs from the Cartesian model of materiality: whereas Descartes denies sensation as having any positive role in the formation of knowledge, Kant considers sensation as indispensable for knowledge. As a correlate, rather than simply understanding matter as extension, Kant argues that matter is better understood in terms of forces. More especially, the various empirical qualities of matter such as impenetrability and density need to be understood in terms of the reciprocity between repulsion and attraction rather than deduced from logical premises.

The key issue I will discuss in detail is Schelling's relationship to chemistry. Simply stated, proceeding through the separation and combination of matter, chemistry artificially enacts what

[109] The question regarding the aesthetic dimension of Schelling's thinking, especially in terms of the relationship between nature and tragedy will not be explored further in the present thesis. For a more detailed explication of the tragic in Schelling, see Jason Wirth, *The Conspiracy of Life*, pp.131-154.

nature produces by herself in a way that let nature emerge "before one's eyes."[110] This means that chemistry is a science in which the unconscious yet operative forces in nature are disclosed or translated into conscious human understanding. Due to its commitment to qualitative differences, chemistry is not only concerned with forces constitutive of the external world but also our own, showing that matter and mind are continuous rather than separated. In this regard, chemistry provides an important stepping-stone beyond the subject-object divide towards the absolute. Finally, by virtue of its capacity to escape or disrupt equilibrium, chemical motion can be seen as a material counterpart of human freedom.

3.1.Reflection

In the Introduction to *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature,* Schelling offers an account of the genesis of philosophy through the dynamics between nature and freedom. He posits that human beings once existed in a "philosophical state of nature" in which they were "One" with nature. This state of union could not last forever since nature's "guardianship" was also a "fetter," a prison that sheltered us as much as confined us. The first stirring of freedom compelled us to depart from this condition of dependency and to seek out the life of the spirit. To this end, Schelling claims that humanity must "abandon itself to the uncertain fate of its own powers" in order to unite with nature once more, no longer a child who depends on nature's succor but as a "victor" who has overcome its own immaturity through the development of its reason.[111]

"How a world outside us, how a Nature and with it experience, is possible --- these are questions for which we have philosophy to thank; or rather, with these questions philosophy came to be."[112] One should note that Schelling does not say "philosophy of nature," but simply "philosophy," which suggests that his philosophy of nature was never meant as a specialized area of inquiry set against others. What Schelling subtly hides underneath his story is that philosophy only arose when nature has withdrawn from us, when the nature of nature is torn asunder by the differentiation between the I and the not-I. Under this light, I argue that Schelling's thinking is

[110] Schelling*, Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, tr. Errol E. Harris & Peter Heath (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.30.
[111] Ibid. pp.9-10.
[112] Ibid.,10.

most provocative when we consider how, for him, the entire business of philosophizing is nothing but a philosophy of nature: a passage of return, recuperation, and convalescence.

It should be emphasized that when humans were "One" with nature, it was also "unaware of itself."[113] More specifically, Schelling writes that "man was still at one with himself and the world about him."[114] This doubling of undifferentiated-ness is what makes nature both a "shelter" and a "prison" since it conceals itself from us in the same gesture as it conceals us from ourselves. Then, reflection occurs:

> As soon as man sets himself in opposition to the external world, the first step to philosophy has been taken. With that separation, reflection first begins; he separates from now on what Nature had always united, separates the object from the intuition, the concept from the image, finally (in that he becomes his own object) himself from himself.[115]

In this separation, almost as violent as birth, the I and the not-I part ways, not knowing that they were once of one life like Aristophanes' hermaphroditic lovers. Yet, Schelling argues, even in this implacable process of self-division, there is a link or bond that was never severed between the I and the not-I, he calls it "action":

> The essence of man is action. But the less he reflects upon himself, the more active he is. His noblest activity is that which is not aware of itself. As soon as he makes himself object, the whole man no longer acts; he has suspended one part of his activity so as to be able to reflect upon the other.[116]

Reflection moves against nature as it is against action, which means "action," even though Schelling does not say exactly what it is, must have something in common with nature by virtue of their shared opposition to reflection. We will come to what this active dimension is towards the end, it should be pointed out for now that it involves an experience of intimacy or intimation, by which I mean the *trace* of a prior undifferentiated unity by virtue of which terms opposed to

[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Schelling, *Ideas*, pp.10-11.

each other feel a certain kinship, tension, even attraction for each other, but cannot bring themselves to resolution *as* themselves.[117]

Furthermore, even though Schelling's contrast between reflection and action is reminiscent of his contrast between theoretical and practical reason in the *Philosophical Letters*, his critique of reflection is much more condemning, he writes:

> Mere reflection, therefore, is a spiritual sickness in mankind, the more so where it imposes itself in domination over the whole man, and kills at the root what in germ is his highest being, his spiritual life, which issues only from Identity. It is an evil which accompanies man into life itself, and distorts all his intuition even for the more familiar objects of consideration.[118]

Schelling's strong stance on reflection suggests that he is not only concerned with the consistency or inconsistency of theoretical systems but has turned his attention to their ethical implications. The most salient indication of this change is marked out by the appearance of "evil." Why does Schelling relate reflection to evil? Why does the question of evil emerge precisely when nature has become a central topic of investigation?

3.2. Schelling's Critique of Mechanism

In the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling claims that "the entire new European philosophy since its beginning (with Descartes) has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground."[119] This utterance might appear strange at first since one could argue that modernity was made possible precisely by an unprecedented advancement in our understanding of nature. Consequently, how can the pursuit of reason, a project whose possibility relies almost exclusively on the understanding of nature, share the common defect that "nature is not available for it?"

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[117] Peter Warnek points out that "The entire inquiry into nature carried out in this seminal work is to be understood as a movement that takes place only after this originary reflection, that therefore can begin only as it finds itself already caught in the negation that defines the operation of reflective conceptual consciousness." See Peter Warnek, "The Experience of Freedom at the Limits of Reflection in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology," in *Chiasmi International*, Vol.15, 2013.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, P.26 [OA 427-30]

This question is centered on how nature opened itself up to human inquiry while simultaneously recoiled unto itself in the process. To be precise, in modernity, nature opened itself up to human inquiry of a particular kind: the mathematical. In Galileo's famous words, the great book of the universe is written in the language of mathematics.[120] It is only by applying mathematical principles that the moderns were able to tap into nature's inner clockwork. Through this transformation, the whole of nature received a mechanistic interpretation in the hands of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and many others. According to mechanism, which is highly significant for Schelling's criticism of natural philosophies prior to him, nature consists of extended bodies that follow laws of inertia, a determination made possible by configuring physical reality in geometrical terms, with locomotion as the ruling paradigm of change. Consequently, the expression that captures the essence of this period is "laws of nature."[121] Nature is lawful because it submits to mathematically formulated principles. Via mathematization, nature comes to be identified as a realm of beings regulated by necessary causation. It needs to be pointed out that what accompanies the mathematization of nature is the practical, humanistic current of the modern project that sought to extend "the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe."[122] Nature becomes manipulable insofar as it submits to mathematically formulated laws, or rather, manipulability over nature is inseparable from the acquisition of knowledge.

In this brief account, it becomes clear that modernity has changed our fundamental attitude towards nature. The regularity discovered in nature comes hand in hand with the manipulation of natural forces for human ends. The key question then is how this momentous shift-in-perspective reflected in philosophy. To begin, all modern determinations of nature --- order, lawfulness, calculability, and manageability --- are made possible by the principles of mind playing the dominant role in philosophical thinking.[123] In the hands of Descartes, there occurred an ever-refined abstraction or separation of thinking from its entanglement in the body or materiality,

[120] I1 saggiatore, 1623 (Opere VI, p.232).

[121] As accounted by Jacob Klein, it is only through Descartes' *Principle of Philosophy* that the expression "laws of nature" entered into mainstream philosophical discourse. Prior to 1600, nobody has used this expression. See Jacob Klein, *Lectures and Essays*, "On the Nature of Nature," p. 231.

[122] Francis Bacon, *The Works of Francis Bacon*, ed.J. Spedding, R.L. Ellis, and D.D. Heath (London, Longmans, 1857-1874), A 19, 118. For a more in-depth discussion on Bacon and the origination of modern thinking, see Richard Kennington, *On Modern Origins: Essays in Early Modern Philosophy* (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2004), pp.1-15.

[123] As Gilson remarks, "You may start with Descartes if you please but then you have to end with Berkley or with Kant." What Gilson is pointing to is that Cartesianism inevitably leads to varying stripes of idealism founded on the predominance of mind over matter. See Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Pontifical Institute of Medical Studies, 2016).

until one arrives at the *cogito*, the immediate certainty of the subject as the ideal foundation of knowledge.

In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes argues that the nature of matter consists not its sensible qualities such as weight and hardness but in extension alone.[124] By "extension" Descartes does not mean anything that appears to the senses but the mathematical property that can be grasped by the mind through geometry.[125] Furthermore, Descartes presents the theory of inertia as the first law of nature. This theory states that a thing always remains in the same state as far as it can and never changes except as a result of external causes.[126] This formulation of matter and natural motion generate several problems, the most immediate of which is the matter – mind dualism: how can matter, as something extended, impact the mind, which is non-extended? If no interaction is possible between them, how could sensation arise? [127] Finally, if nothing moves unless it is moved by an external body upon impact, where does motion as such come from? Descartes' reduction of matter to extension and his universalization of mechanical causation constitute the common target of Kant and Schelling.

Despite its various inconsistencies, the Cartesian outlook on matter proved influential. Beiser presents the basic tenet of mechanical atomism, a school of thought that arose from the basis of Descartes' mechanical physics, as a building-block theory of matter that posits indivisible units as a substrate that grounds change.[128] As we will soon see, Schelling takes issue with this theory because these units, insofar as their combination is posited to explain the formal as well as the qualitative variations of matter, are not themselves subject to the changes they make possible.[129]

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[124] Descartes, *Principle of Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, tr. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.25.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Following his determination of matter as extension, Descartes argues that sensible qualities are external to materiality and therefore must be removed in order to grasp the essence of matter. He writes: "weight, color, and all other such qualities that are perceived by the senses as being in corporeal matter, can be removed from it, while matter itself remains intact; it thus follows that its nature does not depend on any of these qualities." With this disqualification, Descartes has consigned all qualitative changes to the netherworld of secondary qualities and deprived sensation of any expository value for understanding materiality.
[128] Beiser summarizes the basic tenet of mechanical atomism in six points: 1) matter fills space through its mere existence, 2) that it is absolutely impenetrable, 3) that it is not infinitely divisible, but consists in indivisible and extended particles called atoms, 4) that there are empty spaces between atoms, 5) that the parts of elastic fluids (air, heat, light) do not touch, and 6) that the hollowness or density of body depends on the number of interstices between its particles. See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Subjectivism against Subjectivism 1781-1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.512.
[129] Woodard writes: "For Schelling, fundamental substances or objects would seem to disrupt the plural and constant dynamic creation that lies at the heart of nature. If a substance was fundamental then it would have no proper genesis, it would essentially be the ground of itself. These substances would then have to have constructive and synthetic powers over each

In his rejection of mechanical atomism, Schelling returns to a thesis that he tentatively explored in the *Timaeus Essay*, namely, the inseparability between matter and force. But in order to examine this idea in detail, Kant's theory of dynamics must be sketched out beforehand.

Prima facie, Kant's theory of materiality differed from the Cartesian tradition in two important regards, both of which were taken up by Schelling: firstly, Kant rejected the Cartesian dismissal of sense in its theory of knowledge; secondly, Kant thought the Cartesian reduction of the essence of matter to extension is inadequate and wanted to make space for intensive magnitudes.[130] To this end, Kant argued that extension is not simply a mathematical construct, but an event of force characterized by the opposition between repulsion and attraction.

In *Physical Monadology* (1756), Kant was already working out a theory of materiality that anticipates his later views. Attempting to reconcile between the Leibnizian indivisible monads and the infinite divisibility of space held by the Newtonians, Kant argues that the "divisibility of the space which an element occupies" does not imply "the division of the element itself into substantial parts." For Kant, dividing matter is not the same as dividing space because matter has to have a principle of unity that makes it self-subsistent. Following from this, space is not itself substance but "a certain appearance of the external relation of substances."[131] With this distinction in place, Kant argues that monads are not "infinitely small particles of a body" that are immediately present in all parts of the space they occupy but should be understood as a "sphere of activity" generated by repulsion and attraction.[132] Following from this, one could

other and generate other substances without being subjected themselves to such changes. This for Schelling a denial of the radical character of nature itself." See Ben Woodard, Schelling's Naturalism: Motion, Space and the Volition of Thought (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

[130] John Smith, "Kant's Doctrine of Matter," in *The Concept of Matter in Modern Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), pp.141-153.

[131] Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy:1755-1770*, trans. David Walford and Ralf Meerbote, liii.

[132] The main point of contention between the Leibnizians and Newtonians is the following: if space were infinitely divisible as the Newtonians claim, and if all matter were spatial, then all material things are also infinitely divisible. But if matter were infinitely divisible, there cannot be physical monads, or indivisible units out of which the physical universe is composed. Under this light, the Newtonians denied the existence of monads while the Leibnizians argued geometrical divisibility is nothing but a product of the imagination. Unwilling to deny the individuality of substance (since this would undermine the reality of experience) nor demote space to mere imagination (since this would undermine the ideality of space), Kant's solution is an anticipation of his critical position that although space is pure form of intuition whose content or matter must be supplied by experience.

divide this sphere to infinity without dividing the monad, now understood in terms activity rather than a thing, that has made this sphere possible. [133]

In *Metaphysical Foundation*, Kant continues his theory of materiality of repulsion and attraction to explain the empirically given properties of real bodies such as impenetrability, density, and so on.[134] In the second chapter of the text entitled "Dynamics,"[135] Kant accounts for matter occupation or filling of space through the notion of a moving force.[136] This force is repulsive because it causes impinging forces to move away from itself. Kant considers repulsive force to be the expository ground for impenetrability.[137]

Yet, Kant argues repulsion cannot be the only force that is responsible for matter's filling of space for two reasons: one, if matter were constituted by the repulsive force alone, this activity would eventually thin out into nothing. Two, the spatial limitation of one material body cannot be explained by the external pressure exerted upon it by another body, since the second body too must be finite or limited in order to impinge upon the former.[138] Under this light, Kant argues that in order for a finite spatial magnitude to be possible, the repulsive force must be internally checked or constrained by the attractive force, which, as a force that counteracts repulsion by

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[133] David Walford accounts for Kant's position in the *Physical Monadology* in the following way: "Whereas the effect by the activity of the atom (for example, the phenomenon of being solid) is capable of division, and, indeed, division without end, the activity itself which constitutes the being of the atom is not infinitely divisible, indeed, it is not divisible at all." See Walford's introduction to Kant's *Physical Monadology* in Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy: 1755-1770*, tr. & ed. David Walford (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1992), liii-liv.

[134] Different from the *Physical Monadology* however, Kant now rejects the existence of physical monads completely and thought that material substances, like the space they occupy, must be infinitely divisible. Regarding this shift, Michael Friedman writes that "the 'balancing' of the two fundamental forces that had earlier determined a tiny (but finite) volume representing a 'sphere of activity' of impenetrability around a single pointlike central source now determines a definite density of matter at each point in the space in question effected by the mutual interaction of attraction and repulsion." see the Introduction to *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* by Michael Friedman in *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. Michael Friedman (Cambrige, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004), xi.

[135] *Metaphysical Foundations* presents an analysis of matter divided into the sections of phoronomy, dynamics, mechanics, and phenomenology. These four sections follow the order of Kant's table of categories from the first *Critique*: quantity, quality, relation, and modality. In the phoronomical section, matter is considered primarily in terms of properties related to its movability (namely, speed and direction), but not in terms of empirically given properties of real bodies. Such empirical properties constitute the subject-matter of his dynamics which I now focus on.

[136] As indicated in the turn of phrase, Kant thinks it is insufficient to explain extension through abstract logical principles such as the principle of non-contradiction, since extension is a concrete event happening in the physical world. He writes: "But the principle of noncontradiction does not repel a matter advancing to penetration into a space where another is found. Only when I ascribe to that which occupies a space a force to repel every external movable that approaches, do I understand how it contains a contradiction for yet another thing of the same kind to penetrate into the space occupied by a thing." Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, p.34.

[137] For example, when we press a wooden stick against the wall, the resistance we feel, or rather the resistance that the stick encounters from the wall, is nothing but the repulsive forces of these two objects pushing against each other.

[138] Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, p.46.

drawing everything to itself, is just as original as the former.[139] Taken together, Kant argues that both repulsion and attraction must be posited in order to explain extension, which entails that any matter, as a concrete filling of space, can be understood as a degree of force created by the interaction between these two forces.

Turning now to Schelling, his critique of mechanism can be summarized as the following: whether it is the Cartesian determination of matter as pure extension, or the Newtonian corpuscular theory of matter that posits the existence of impenetrable and indivisible particles, or the Humean view that sees the world as composed of disconnected objects, they all conceive matter as something passive, inert, and is only moved when it is acted on by another body. Consequently, these views consider nature as lacking any spontaneity and requires some external power to account for its causal activity. Against these mechanistic conceptions that treat material nature as a dead object, Schelling posits that the whole of nature must be viewed instead as "animated,"[140] that is, something that possesses an intrinsic principle of motion as discussed in the *Timaeus Essay*. This conviction leads him to seek a more original dimension of materiality through the interaction of forces.

Specifically, through Kant's dynamics, Schelling realized that matter is not a noun but a verb, not a substance but an action. Matter occupies space not because it is something that is solid or impenetrable. Rather, it is solid and impenetrable *because* it is occupying space through force. In other words, solidity and impenetrability are precisely modes of activity by which matter is expressed. The fact that a substance is ever inferred from these modes of action is an error or distortion caused by reflection, which has the tendency to conflate what is "separable in thought" with what is "separable in fact." Schelling writes:

> But because, in reflection, it is possible to conceive of attractive and repulsive forces as distinct from matter, people suppose (through a deception by no means uncommon) that

[139] Kant presents their relationship through a straight line with two points. While repulsion causes the points to move away from each other, the attractive force make them move towards each other. He writes: "Attractive force is that moving force of matter whereby it compels another to approach it; consequently, when such force is found among all parts of matter, then it endeavors by means of this force to diminish the distance of its parts from one another, and hence the space which they together occupy." Ibid., 41-42.

[140] As I will discuss in Chapter IV, although the idea of an "animating principle" in nature goes back to Plato, Schelling's reformulation of this idea is indebted to Leibniz. See Schelling, *Ideas*, p.35.

> what can be separated in thought is also separate in fact. If we succumb to this deception, then matter is just there, without any attractive or repulsive forces.[141]

As indicated in the passage, once reflection has observed certain properties or activities in relation to an object or phenomena, it immediately asks what such objects may be in themselves independent from their properties and activities.[142] Now, to perform an activity means to move in a certain way; the separation of activities from matter is therefore tantamount to introducing the absence of motion into matter. For Schelling, this absence of motion is precisely implied by mechanical atomism. In other words, if matter ultimately consists of hard, impenetrable, and inert particles that only moved upon external impact as the mechanical atomists claim, then it is impossible to account for how motion could have ever arisen from this state of eternal rest. Conversely, if matter were conceivable as a degree of interaction between repulsion and attraction as Kant has proposed, then it cannot have a substrate where such interaction is absent. This is another way of saying that matter, for Schelling, must be capable of infinite motion in itself. To anticipate the next chapter, prior to Schelling, the governing paradigm of infinite motion is locomotion, or change of place.[143] Schelling proposed a viable alternative to this paradigm through the concept of organization.

Under this light, Schelling's critique of mechanism has to do with its denial of transformation on the basic level of existence. This begs the question of what it means to conceive nature based on universal transformation in the first place, the first step that Schelling took in this direction happens in chemistry.

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[141] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.154.

[142] For Schelling, this manner of thinking is reflected in the language one employs when describing matter: "Matter has forces." I know that this expression is very common. But how? "Matter has" --- here then it is presupposed as something that exists for itself and independently of its forces. So would these forces be merely accidental to it?" Ibid. 18.

[143] The primacy of locomotion is central to modern physics. As a general idea, it can be sourced back to Aristotle. In Book VIII of his *Physics*, Aristotle writes: "For one must consider whether it is possible for any motion to be continuous or not, and if it is possible, what this motion is, and which of the motions is primary; for it sis clear that, if there must always be motion, and a certain motion is primary and continuous, then the first mover moves something with motion, which must be one and the same, continuous, and primary. There since there are three motions, with respect to size, attribute, or place, this last, which we call change of place, must be primary." See Aristotle, *Physics*, 260a 20-30. All quoted passages from the Physics are taken from Joe Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick and London, Rutgers University Press, 2001).

3.3. Materiality as Equilibrium-Disequilibrium

In the forgoing analysis, I have sketched out Schelling's critique of the mechanistic determination of matter and his indebtedness to Kant's dynamics. The main trajectory that I started to trace out deals with Schelling's contribution in the momentous shift from understanding nature as a machine to nature as a living system. Continuing with Schelling's critique of mechanism, the present section engages with Schelling's construal of matter in terms of equilibrium and disequilibrium. The main topic to be discussed is Schelling's understanding of chemistry.[144] I argue that by exploring the possibility of a "philosophy of chemistry," Schelling became one of the pioneering thinkers who thought about nature in organizational terms.

I begin with Schelling's general account of cosmic motion, which is influenced by Kant's account of galactical formation and the movement of the planetary bodies as presented in *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* of 1755.[145] In this account, Schelling presents the cosmos as a self-contained whole consisting of an infinite number of nested systems constituted by the collective movement of indefinite number of unequal bodies. Furthermore, each body in the cosmos (e.g. a planet) is both a whole/system in itself as well as a part of a larger whole/system. More specifically, a body is a whole or a system insofar as it possesses a center of gravitation around which its components parts orbit (e.g. the earth and moon); a body is also a part insofar as it orbits the center of gravitation of a larger system (e.g. earth and the sun). Following from this general sketch of cosmic motion, each being --- no matter how large or small --- can be considered as a system unto itself (i.e., as a cooperation of its parts) insofar as it

[144] As pointed out by Dahlia Nassar, by the time Kant composed his *Metaphysical Foundations* in the mid-1780s, the limitations of mechanical philosophy were widely recognized, among them is its inability to provide a satisfactory ground for the newly discovered chemical phenomena, which disclosed a whole new dimension of materiality based on action at a distance. See Dahlia Nassar, "Kant, Schelling, and the Organization of Matter," in *Kantian Legacies in German Idealism*, ed. Gerad Gentry (New York: Routledge, 2021), p.214.

[145] In his Introduction to Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, Michael Friedman writes: "The cosmological conception presented in the Theory of the Heavens […] included a striking vision of how the various galactic structures are distributed throughout the universe. The smallest such structure (due to nebular formation) is our own solar system, consisting of the sun surrounded by the six then known planets. The next larger structure is the Milky Way galaxy, in which our solar system as a whole orbits around a larger center together with a host of other stars and (possible) planetary systems. But the Milky Way galaxy itself, for Kant, is then part of an even larger rotating system consisting of a number of galaxies; this system is part of a still larger rotating system; and son on ad infinitum." See Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans. Michael Friedman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. xii.

is at the same time a part of a larger system; as a whole unto itself, a body is relatively independent, while considered as a part of a larger system, it is dependent.[146]

Schelling posits every motion in the cosmos is relative: A is moving only when B is thought to be at rest relative to the movement of A, even though B may be thought as moving relative to C, and so on *ad infinitum*.[147] Furthermore, Schelling argues that the movement of the whole entails rest among the parts and vice versa. Schelling writes:

> In the body that is moving, there must be likewise be relative rest, that is, the parts of the body, while they are all changing their relation to other bodies in space, must not alter their relation among themselves, and if they do change it, then for this to be perceptible, there must be others that do not change it, i.e., the body must at least be persistent, even if it is not in a persisting state.[148]

From this, Schelling presents two kinds of motion, since a body can be considered as moving both in relation to another body as well as in relation to itself: the former pertains to mechanical motion, which involves whole-to-whole impact among what is moved, and the latter is specific to chemical motion, which has to do with the movement of the parts within a given whole. Furthermore, Schelling points out that if we want to study external motion among bodies, the internal motion of these bodies must be taken out of account since their partial motion must be assumed to persistent in order for them to be considered as bodies or "self-contained wholes" in the first place.[149] Similarly, if one were to investigate chemical motion, external motion must be bracketed. Taken together, the whole of the natural world can be analyzed in either mechanical or chemical terms, insofar as "mechanical motion presupposes parts at rest in the moving body; chemical motion, on the contrary, motion of the parts in a body that does not move."[150]

Based on his differentiation of mechanical and chemical motions, Schelling presents a "hierarchy of motions" corresponding to three sciences. On the most basic level, there is the "universal

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[146] See Schelling, *Ideas*, pp.143-149.

[147] "But just as the universal motion presupposes partial rest, so the latter in turn presupposes a still more partial motion, which again presupposes a more partial rest, and so *ad infinitum*. I cannot conceive the earth to be at rest relative to the heavens, unless there again be motion of parts upon it, and this partial motion, e.g., of the air, of rivers, of solid bodies, is again inconceivable without presupposing rest of the parts in these things themselves, and so on." Ibid.,147.

[148] Ibid.,146-147.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid.147-148.

dynamic motion," which is a general designation of all motions insofar as they are reducible to the "freeplay" of attractive and repulsive forces --- this is the subject of general dynamics. The next in order is mechanics, which, according to George di Giovanni's account of the *Ideas*, studies the "limited, stable relations that emerge between bodies."[151] Finally, there is chemistry, which investigates the motion among a body's constituent forces. Regarding the difference between mechanics and chemistry, Giovanni concludes: "Whereas mechanics studies the lines of particular necessity to which the general free play of forces gives rise, chemistry's interest is directed to the spontaneity, the contingency of motions of which the same free play can also be the cause."[152]

Furthermore, Schelling argues that chemical motion is the "opposite" of mechanical motion because it is based on the possibility of disequilibrium that mechanical motion excludes, he writes:

> In every individual body, attractive and repulsive forces are necessarily in equilibrium. But this necessity is felt only in contrast to the possibility that this equilibrium should be disturbed. The ground of it can indeed be thought of as an endeavor of matter to escape from the equilibrium and yield to the free play of its forces. Matter…in which we presuppose no such possibility (which is incapable of chemical treatment), is called, in the special sense of the word, dead matter.[153]

By Schelling's definition, "dead matter" signifies an understanding of materiality in which the "endeavor to escape from equilibrium" is excluded. This exclusion refers to a blind spot in the mechanistic outlook that only becomes visible through chemistry. What then is this endeavor? Why does Schelling say that matter, under the mechanistic outlook, is "dead"?

According to Nassar, there is a set of assumptions or implications that come with the mechanistic outlook regarding what we can expect to find in space, Nassar writes:

> For it implies, first, that this entity is composed of parts that are externally drawn together or repelled from one another. In other words, the relations between the entity's parts are

[151] George Giovanni, "Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature," in Journal of the History of Philosophy, Vol 17, Number 2, April 1979, pp.197-215.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.148.

> determined entirely by the laws of motion. Second, it implies that the parts themselves are entirely externally determined […] Put differently, what they are has nothing to do with internal structure, but only with their external relations […][154]

As indicated in the passage, the mechanistic outlook has no regard for the qualitative difference among objects; their internal structure has no bearing on what they are and how they behave. For mechanism then, nature has no inside; all transformations are thoroughly determined by laws of motion in space. As Nassar puts it, matter under mechanism lacks what Kant calls "internal activity," which is the unique feature of spontaneity and life.[155]

In light of Nassar's observations, it becomes evident what Schelling wants to accomplish through the concepts of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Insofar as these two concepts precisely pertain to the balance/imbalance among the internal forces of a given body,[156] they intend to capture the more basic conditions of material existence prior to or underwriting extension. Furthermore, insofar as mechanism assumes that matter has no "internal activity," it also cannot address questions pertaining to organization or individuation, namely, how a particular being comes to be, maintains itself, and eventually perishes or changes into something else. This is another crucial advantage that chemical explanations have over mechanistic ones, since the former can examine the material world temporally in terms of process rather than product. Schelling writes: "Chemistry […] considers matter in its becoming, and has as its object a free play --- and thus also a free motion --- of the dynamic forces among themselves, without impact from outside."[157]

To conclude our forgoing analysis, equilibrium-disequilibrium is a dynamic way of understanding material nature that has been made possible by chemistry.[158] In the section from the Ideas entitled "Philosophy of Chemistry in General," Schelling writes:

> Its object, moreover, is to investigate the qualitative diversity of matter, for only to that extent is it necessary in the system of our knowledge. It seeks to attain this object by

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[154] Dalia Nassar, Romantic Empiricism: Nature, Art, and Ecology from Herder to Humbolt (Oxford University Press, 2022), p.37.
[155] Ibid.
[156] "In every body that is moving, I suppose internal rest, that is, an equilibrium of the inner forces." Schelling, *Ideas*, 147.
[157] Ibid.,222.
[158] Following from his theory of material body as interconnected systems, every individual body may count as one in relation to the plurality of bodies that constitute it. At the same time, these bodies are themselves "ones" or unities that can be further divided into parts. Most importantly, insofar as Schelling's theory argues that this infinitely nested system can never "bottom out" at indivisible atoms or bodies-without-parts, a body is merely a relative term pertaining to the degree of cooperation of plural forces or activities.

> effecting separations and combinations --- artificially to be sure, but by means that Nature herself provides.[159]

In order to understand how qualitative changes occur in nature, chemistry must artificially separate what nature has united before combining them into new unities. The separation of what is mutually bound together requires the disruption of the original equilibrium of matter before a new combination can be attained. Under this light, chemistry can be seen as the conscious retrieve or repetition of what nature produces unconsciously; whereas nature presents to our senses initially and for the most part finished and complete products, we may probe into how nature has arrived at such products in herself by freedom. In other words, chemistry gets us one step closer to understanding what I in the next chapter call the "becoming-life-of-life," since it treats matter in organizational terms, that is, as a multiplicity of forces acting in concert.[160]

3.4. Being-in-Nature

As pointed out by Beiser in his comprehensive overview of German idealism, Schelling's early philosophy of nature is motivated by overcoming the aporia of classical epistemology based on correspondence theory of truth.[161] According to this theory, true knowledge entails the demonstration of a necessary causal nexus between ideas and things, subject and object, mind and matter. This need for nexus foregrounds the central problem that plagues Cartesian dualism and mechanism: if we were to posit that mind and matter belonged to utterly incommunicable domains, then no such link can be found, and the entire edifice of knowledge would collapse

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[159] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.206.

[160] This point brings us back to Schelling's interpretation of the *Timaeus* and the *Philebus* as discussed in Chapter I. In the *Philebus*, Plato writes that when quantitative relations such as "equal" and "double" are introduced into incessant fluctuation of ἄπειρον, it "puts an end to conflict of opposites" and "making them well proportioned and harmonious by the introduction of number." This already suggests that the blending of ἄπειρον and πέρας does not yield a static thing but a state of equilibrium constituted by a host competing forces. Furthermore, this passage parallels the discussion on the *systasis* between intellect and necessity in the *Timaeus*: even though there cannot be any equilibrium or beings without proportioning of the forces, such proportioning cannot take away the agency or individuality that is intrinsic to these forces. Rather, the fact that these forces can be organized or "persuaded" at all signifies that they enjoy some degree of independence from the whole, an unruliness that, under the right circumstances, would reassert itself. In a way, this model can be considered even more superior than Kant's repulsion-attraction, since the fourfold structure has a mediating third (aitia). Equilibrium occurs when πέρας keeps ἄπειρον in check, while disequilibrium occurs when ἄπειρον breaks free from the limitation of πέρας --- a dynamic account of organization must posit both movements simultaneously.

[161] See Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801* (Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 511-515.

before it even gets off the ground. Thus in contrast to mechanism that only explains how things affect things, Schelling argues that the real philosophical question has to do with how things could affect me as a free being, more specifically, he asks how the very idea of nature necessitates its representation in us. Schelling writes:

> The question is not whether and how that assemblage of phenomena and the series of causes and effects, which we call the course of Nature, has become actual outside us, but how they have become actual for us, how that system and that assemblage of phenomena have found their way to our minds, and how they have attained the necessity in our conception with which we are absolutely compelled to think of them.[162]

On the one hand, the position that the external world exists in complete isolation from the mind is not viable, since it cannot account for the occurrence of consciousness, let alone our conscious representations pertaining to nature. On the other hand, to posit that nature is nothing but a product of the mind risks solipsism and extreme subjectivism. Given this impasse, the issue of "necessitation" becomes crucial for Schelling's conception of true knowledge; his distinction between "actual outside us" and "actual for us" precisely pivots on finding the nexus or the "secret bond" between nature and the mind.

Here we see Schelling advancing towards what lies at the very heart of reflection; its various operations scattered in the text --- separation, dichotomy, the making permanent of the subject-object divide --- are now being gathered up into one issue: how does reason move beyond reflection? How does nature show itself to us? Both trajectories, the way in and the way out, converge on the question of access, which the present section seeks to tease out through what I call being-in-nature.

The overcoming of reflection begins with a critique of the primacy of understanding in cognition, Schelling writes:

> Because understanding does everything it does with consciousness (hence the illusion of its freedom), everything---including reality itself --- becomes, under its hands, ideal; the

[162] Schelling, *Ideas*, 34.

> man whose whole mental power has been reduced to the capacity for making and analyzing concepts knows no reality --- the very question of it seems nonsense to him.[163]

In parallel with his critique of reflection that "imposes itself in domination over the whole man," Schelling argues that understanding, a "subservient" and "slavish" faculty that merely "apprehends, grasps and retains" what a creative faculty offers to it,[164] has now become the master. Furthermore, this pathology of the understanding is most visibly reflected in its determination regarding the reality of nature. Schelling writes:

> If all our knowledge depended on concepts, there would be no possibility of persuading ourselves of any reality. That we envisage attractive and repulsive forces --- or are even merely able to do so --- makes them at most into a work of thought. But we maintain that matter is real outside us, and matter itself, insofar as it is real outside us (and not merely present in our concepts), is possessed of attractive and repulsive forces.[165]

In this passage, Schelling makes known the shortcoming of Kant's dynamics, namely, Kant has only established that repulsion and attraction necessarily belong to the concept of matter, he has not demonstrated their reality.[166] In order to take materiality as real, repulsion and attraction can no longer be taken as merely a "work of thought," since this would only yield the possibility, rather than the actuality of matter. To open our eyes to what understanding has occluded, namely the reality of forces, one must turn to a different faculty, namely, intuition.

> But nothing is real for us save what is directly given to us, without any mediation by concepts, or any consciousness of our freedom. Yet nothing reaches us directly except by intuition, and intuition is therefore the highest element in our knowledge. So the reason why matter is necessarily possessed of those forces would have to lie in intuition itself. It would have to be demonstrable, from the nature of our external intuition, that whatever is an object of this intuition must be intuited as matter, i.e., as the product of attractive and

[163] Ibid., 172.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid. 173.
[166] Nassar: "The fundamental problem […] has to do with the fact that for Kant the dynamic-metaphysical method does not approach matter as an object of outer intuition, but rather as a concept." See Nassar, D. "Kant, Schelling and Organization of Matter" in Kantian Legacies in German Idealism, ed. Gerad Gentry (New York, Routledge, 2021), p.217.

repulsive forces. They would thus be conditions of the possibility of outer intuition, and from this, indeed, would stem the necessity with which we think them.[167]

As emphasized by Dalia Nassar, the operative term that grounds Schelling's theory of intuition is "feeling," which is obviously related to sensation, but he also wants to distance it from its traditional determination as the passive reception of impressions from the outside.[168] Prima facie, feeling is an experience of being limited by something. For example, the room cools, and I feel cold --- I am compelled to present this impression as my passive reception of an external change. This passivity account of sensation is rooted in the assumption that the object is independent from the observer:

Object ---- causes ---- Ideas (theoretical)

This passive representation of sensation is related to the predominance of theoretical reason because it is based on the assumption that sensation is caused by the affection of a not-I on the I. Schelling argues this account fails to capture the truth of sensation since it tries to explain the matter-mind interaction through a "matter-on-matter" model. Consequently, it poses an insurmountable obstacle to the realization of knowledge: if objects cause ideas, then they precede the ideas --- how can we ensure that our ideas, as something dependent, do indeed represent what is independent? In other words, if cognition were to begin with passivity, then knowledge would be fundamentally conditioned by the course of an absolute not-I or thing-in-itself that is ultimately unknowable. Instead, Schelling asks which prior process must be in place in order to account for the occurrence of sensation as a feeling of being constrained or necessitated. To this end, Schelling posits an unconscious yet active dimension in the subject that acts as the indispensable backdrop against which impressions appear:

Immersion --- enables --- Sensation (practical)

Returning to the example of the room, Schelling's postulation of a positive dimension in the subject argues that no change in temperature could be passively registered by me unless I were immersed in the environment as an actively sensing agent --- I must be always and already in nature in order for nature to affect me. With this addition, Schelling presents a twofold structure

[167] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.173.
[168] Nassar, D. "Kant, Schelling and Organization of Matter" in in *Kantian Legacies in German Idealism*, pp. 225-229.

of intuition in which an outgoing movement from the subject is integrated with the ingoing influence of external objects. In the first movement, the object is independent and active whereas as the subject is dependent and passive; in the second movement however, it is the subject that is active and the object passive.

It should be noted that this twofold structure neatly recapitulates Schelling's contrast between dogmatism and criticism discussed in the *Philosophical Letters*. There, Schelling already argued that self-consciousness is impossible without resistance provided by the external world. He writes: "An activity without any object, an activity to which there is not resistance, never returns into itself. Only through a return to one's self does consciousness arise. Only a restricted reality [*Realität*] is an actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] for us."[169] Most importantly, he argues that "the intensity of our consciousness is in inverse ratio to the extension of our being," meaning that our immersion in the world would remain unconscious and inarticulate without the limitation or restriction provided by objects.[170]

By relating Schelling's theory of feeling back to the movement of self-consciousness in *Philosophical Letters*, it becomes clear what Schelling is truly after: an experience of the actuality of matter without which thought would be trapped in what he later refers to as the "circle of consciousness." Schelling writes:

> But for a being that originally only thinks and represents, there is no seeing how anything outside him can have reality. For such as being, the entire real world (which exists, of course, only in his presentations) would have to be a mere thought. That something exists, and is independent of me, I can know only in that I feel myself absolutely necessitated to represent this something to myself; but how can I feel this necessitation without the simultaneous feeling that in regard to all presenting I am originally free…?[171]

In feeling limited, I counter an otherness through an experience of matter that compels me to represent it as something independent. At the same time however, the feeling of necessitation also makes known something fundamental about myself as an actively sensing agent, a *being-in-nature* that is not reducible to the order of necessity and compulsion that I now encounter: my

[169] Schelling, "Philosophical Letters," p. 184.
[170] Ibid., 185.
[171] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.172.

being limited is only possible when I feel, at the same time, that I am originally unlimited and free:

> Only by contrast to a free activity in myself does that which freely acts upon me take on the attributes of reality; only upon the original force of my self does the force of an outer world break in. But conversely also (as the light-ray becomes color only in falling upon a body), it is only vis-à-vis the object that the original activity in me first becomes thinking, or self-conscious presentation.
>
> With the first consciousness of an external world, the consciousness of myself is also present, and conversely, with the first moment of my self-consciousness, the real world appears before me. The belief in the reality outside me arises and grows with the belief in my own self; one is as necessary as the other; both --- not speculatively separated, but in their fullest, most intimate co-operation --- are the element of my life and all my activity.[172]

In this striking passage, what Schelling meant by our active dimension of being, hitherto occluded by reflection, is finally disclosed: in intuition, the consciousness of myself and of nature come into being simultaneously as interdependent aspects of a single process. The feeling of limitation indicates an irreducible difference between subject and object; the fact that limitation could occur at all means that there is an identity or commensurability that enabled their differentiation. This difference-in-identity discloses an ontological kinship or intimacy between matter and mind, the two terms that, under the predominance of reflection, were judged to be incommunicable.

Nassar argues that Schelling's theory of intuition, insofar as it is aimed at establishing the reality of matter and of nature, necessitates an embodied theory of knowledge, she writes:

> Intuition --- as sensation --- thus provides the foundation of my sense of the external world and of myself. Precisely because intuition involves the two feelings of constraint and freedom, it furnishes a non-mediated insight into the external world. It is important to emphasize that it is intuition as sensation, and as sensation that comes from the outside, i.e., a sensation that I cannot ascribe to my constructing or thinking mind. Precisely

[172] Ibid.,174.

> because it is inspired by a spatial entity, this feeling gives me a sense of myself in space (of myself as a body), and of myself in space with others. This spatial and embodied character cannot be demonstrated a priori or derived from a first principle. For concepts (whether a priori or empirical) cannot establish the fact of something existing in space, the fact of embodiment --- they can establish its possibility, but not its actuality.[173]

Through this account of ontological kinship, Schelling has also shown a way to unify the divide between theoretical reason and practical reason: the passive/theoretical model presents a world in which everything hangs together through necessary causation in relation to which a subject must forgo its own agency, while the active/practical model gives unlimited power to the subject and threatens to take control over the objective world completely. As already mentioned in my analysis of *Philosophical Letters*, both positions amount to *Schwärmerei* once taken in isolation from the other; what is needed then is precisely a point of union, a reconciliation between nature and human beings --- this is where aesthetic reason comes in.

Theoretical	Aesthetic	Practical
Nature affecting me	Intuition	I affecting nature
S (-): O (+)	active-passive	S (+): O (-)
	[Being-in-nature]	

Being-in-nature is not simply stating that I exist in a world of objects. Instead, being-in-nature posits the self's immersion in nature as much as nature's immersion in the self. Being-in-nature occurs in the aesthetic domain of feeling. Schelling writes:

> Repulsive force without attractive force is formless; attractive force without repulsive force has no object. The one [repulsion] represents the original, unconscious mental self-activity, which by nature is unrestricted; the other, the conscious, determinate activity, which first gives form, limit and outline to everything. But the object is never without its

[173] Nassar, D. "Kant, Schelling, and the Organization of Matter," in *Kantian Legacies in German Idealism*, p. 226.

> limit, or matter without its form. To two may be separated in reflection; to think of them as separated in reality is absurd.[174]

Interestingly, this passage takes us back to Schelling's distinction between matter and the elements in the *Timaeus Essay*. Like formless matter, our being-in-nature is an "unconscious mental activity," which requires the formation or limitation by nature in order to become a conscious experience. But once this occurs, our experience immediately becomes the equivalent of the elements (or informed matter) in relation to which reflection begins to unfold:

> So long as I myself am identical with Nature, I understand what a living nature is as well as I understand my own life; I apprehend how this universal life of Nature reveals itself in manifold forms, in progressive developments, in gradual approximations to freedom. As soon, however, as I separate myself, and with me everything ideal, from Nature, nothing remains to me but a dead object, and I cease to comprehend how a life outside me can be possible.[175]

As stated, the separation of myself from nature is also the separation of the ideal from the real, which is another way of stating that the more the ideal accrues unto myself, the more nature becomes only a dead object in relation to me. I do not understand life "outside me" precisely because conscious reflection can only start after my life has been individuated. What the feeling of freedom discloses is precisely the formlessness of life, which is a life that I share with nature. The crucial clue that Schelling leaves regarding this life is that it occurs in terms of degrees:

> The more active the *mind*, the more heightened the *sense*, and conversely, the duller the *sense*, the more oppressed the mind. He who *is* otherwise *intuits* otherwise also, and he who *intuits* differently *is* differently also.[176]

Thus begins Schelling's convalescence.

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[174] Schelling, *Ideas*, 187
[175] Ibid., 36.
[176] Ibid., 174.

Chapter IV. The Becoming-Life-of-Life: Emergence in *On the World Soul*

A traveler in Italy makes the remark that the whole history of the world may be demonstrated on the great obelisk at Rome---so, likewise, in every product of Nature. Every mineral body is a fragment of the annals of the Earth. But what is the Earth? --- Its history is interwoven with the history of the whole of Nature, and so passes from the fossil through the whole of inorganic and organic Nature, until it culminates in the history of the universe --- one chain.

F.W.J. Schelling

The present chapter is centered on Schelling's understanding of organization as articulated in his *On the World Soul*.[177] In the forgoing analysis, I have presented the basic movement of Schelling's philosophy of nature as a process of reconstituting nature from the vantage point of the spirit. Furthermore, this retrieve is only possible if nature is, by herself, already constituted by the *logos*, an intelligible principle that compels reason to acknowledge the spiritual element intrinsic to it. In the *Ideas*, this reconstitution is centered on freeing materiality from the confines of reflection by undoing the matter-mind dualism through force and feeling. In continuity with this trajectory of reconstituting nature as spirit, *On the World Soul* takes on another dualism: the organic and the inorganic. This dualism can be stated in the following way: the inorganic is the world of lifeless matter following mechanistic laws (and efficient causation) while the organic is the world of life and the basis of human freedom --- as long as this opposition is maintained, no unified account of nature and human beings is possible.

While the question of organism was mostly left out of the *Ideas* and was only taken up in *On the World Soul*, it should be reminded that Schelling became interested in organisms early on. As discussed in the first chapter, the idea of the world soul already featured centrally in the *Timaeus Essay*. Furthermore, Schelling thought Plato's determination of the cosmos as a living animal

[177] Compared with Fichte's absolute I and Hegel's absolute spirit, Schelling's world-soul is a much less discussed topic in the scholarship. As pointed out Paul Franks, the notion is often passed over or deemed indefensible in the current Anglophone revival of post-Kantian Idealism.[177] Fortunately, progress has been made in the past decade by Iain Hamilton Grant, Miklós Vassányi, Paul Franks, and more recently Naomi Fisher. See Grant, "'Philosophy become Genetic': The Physics of the World Soul," in *New Schelling*, London and New York: Continuum, 2004. 128-151. Miklós Vassányi, *Anima Mundi: The Rise of the World Soul Theory in Modern German Philosophy*, Springer, 7. Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2011. Naomi Fisher, "The Unity of Nature in Schelling's World Soul," in *The Review of Metaphysics* 74 (June 2021):527-52.

exhibited significant resonance with Kant's determination of natural end as a cause and effect of itself.[178] Further still, in his comparison between poesis and the genesis of the cosmos by demiurge, Schelling made various allusions to Kant's intuitive or divine understanding.

Given their continuity, there are also significant differences between the *Timaeus Essay* and *On the World Soul*. Paul Franks argues that by 1798, Schelling's understanding of nature changed from that which is grounded in the human subject to that which grounds the human subject.[179] This change is not only crucial for understanding the general orientation of *On the World Soul* but also how the *Freedom Essay* developed from out of the philosophy of nature. In what follows, I argue that it is through a confrontation with the third *Critique* that Schelling first realized structure of life as emergence and the ground of emergence.

My analysis begins with Kant's formulation of organism in the third *Critique* by interrogating the implication of Kant's claim that "the organization of nature is not analogous with any causality that we know."[180] I argue that from Schelling's perspective, Kant's account of nature amounts to an incomplete or partial organizationalism because it only attributes organization to a region of beings rather than the whole. I argue this partiality is caused by Kant's employment of human freedom as the yardstick by which natural organization is measured. Consequently, while Kant recognizes the exceptional character of organism relative to mechanism, the dualism between determinism and freedom remained intact in Kant because the scope of organization could not be extended into the inorganic world.

Turning next to Schelling, I argue that his notion of the world soul precisely ventures into where Kant has backed away in the third *Critique*, namely, a complete organizationalism that no longer maintains a strict separation between matter and life, the inorganic and the organic. Whereas Kant uses human freedom to measure self-organization in nature, Schelling posits self-

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[178] Also, Schelling explicitly interprets *aitia* that binds together apeiron and peras as "intelligent self-activity." "Timaeus (1794)," p. 224.

[179] Franks: "Schelling is no longer idealist in the same sense. Instead of treating nature in relation to a presupposed ground that is 'in us', Schelling's treatise regards nature…as that which must give rise to consciousness…idealism now consists, not in subjective grounding, but rather in nature's trajectory towards consciousness, not in the subject as origin but in the subject as culmination." See Paul Franks, "From World-Soul to Universal Organism: Maimon's Hypothesis and Schelling's Physicalization of a Platonic-Kabbalistic Concept" in *Schelling's Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity*. Ed. Anthony Bruno (Oxford University Press, 2020), pp.82-83.

[180] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgmen*t, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 2009), p.246. AA 5: 374.

organization as the ground from which human freedom is generated. The crux of this reversal pivots on treating life as a *degree-being* that pervades the universe, an idea that Schelling arrived at through Leibniz. I call this new principle the becoming-life-of-life, which allowed him to claim, in the *First Outline*, that nature is autonomous.

4.1. The Causality that We do not Know: Kant's Organizationalism in the Third *Critique*

I begin with a general sketch of the third *Critique* in relation to Kant's critical project. In the first and second *Critiques*, Kant has established that the phenomenal or natural world is governed by deterministic laws while the noumenal world of freedom is founded on moral laws we impose on ourselves. In the introduction to the third *Critique* however, Kant points out that there is an "incalculable gulf" between the domain of the concepts of nature, which is "sensible," and the domain of the concept of freedom, which is "supersensible."[181] One could see how this gulf poses a serious problem for the overall consistency of Kant's critical system, since the distance between nature and freedom seems to be too great to guarantee that our moral aspirations are in fact realizable in nature.[182] Consequently, a mediation is needed between theoretical reason (where understanding is legislative) and practical reason (where reason is legislative), leading Kant to a renewed investigation into the power of judgment and the concept of the "purposiveness of nature" specific to it.[183]

In order to specify how judgment performs the mediating role named above, Kant differentiates between determinative and reflective judgment. The former, already presented in the first *Critique*, pertains to the subsumption of a particular under a given universal law or principle. In the reflective judgment however, only the particular is given while the universal must be found.

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[181] Ibid. 63 (AA 5:175-176).

[182] As pointed out Rachel Zuckert, this gulf indicates that "human freedom and moral value seems to lie somehow outside or to be alien to the vents of the natural world." See Rachel Zuckert, "Organism and System in German Idealism" in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 271-291.

[183] "The power of judgement provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom, which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a purposiveness of nature; for thereby is the possibility of the final end, which can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws, cognized." Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 82 [AA 5: 196].

The key question then becomes: why does Kant introduce the reflective judgment into his system? What function does it serve?

As pointed out by Paul Guyer, from Kant's perspective, the first *Critique* has already constructed the groundwork for a possible system of knowledge, what remains to be done is an actual system in which our experience of the empirical world can be classified under more concrete concepts.[184] This disparity between the possibility and the actuality of a system motivates the differentiation between the two forms of judgment aforementioned: in the determinative judgment, we already have the rules or principles made available to us by the understanding, which means all we need is to find the particulars that fall under them. The problem with the determinative use of judgment, however, has to do with the limitation of the understanding itself. As sketched out in the first *Critique*, understanding only provides us with the "possibility of a nature in general" but has left the "manifold of forms" in nature undetermined.[185] These forms, infinite in scope, are "alien" and "contingent" to the understanding because they cannot be attained *a priori* and can only be given to us through particular experiences. In light of this limitation, judgment needs to find, within itself, a way of organizing these particular forms or "modifications of transcendental concepts of nature."[186] This is why the reflective judgment, as that which ascends from the particular to the universal, is introduced; it supplements discursive understanding with a "order of nature" in which the manifold of particular laws can be brought into unity as an integrated "system of experience."[187]

Having stated the essential aim of the reflective judgment in the third *Critique*, I now turn to the question of organisms that features centrally in it. Due to the limitations of the present section, my analysis focuses on the one issue which I argue is most vital for Schelling: the reality and extent of organization in nature.

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[184] See the editor's introduction to the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, xxiv.

[185] "The determining power of judgement under universal transcendental laws, given by the understanding, merely subsumes; the law is sketched out for it a priori, and it is therefore unnecessary for it to think of a law for itself in order to be able to subordinate the particular in nature to the universal. --- But there is such a manifold of forms in nature, as it were so many modifications of the universal transcendental concepts of nature that are left undetermined by those laws that the pure understanding gives a priori, since these pertain only to the possibility of a nature (as object of the senses) in general, that there must nevertheless also be laws for it which, empirical, may seem to be contingent in accordance with the insight of our understanding, but which, if they are to be called laws…must be regarded as necessary on a principle of the unity of the manifold, even if that principle is unknown to us." Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p. 67 [AA 5: 179-80].

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid.

To begin, Kant argues that an organism cannot be fully explained through mechanism and efficient cause. For example, Kant says that if one were to encounter a regular hexagon drawn in the sand of apparently uninhibited island, one would not judge this figure to be caused by the collective effort of natural forces (the sand, the nearby sea, the wind, the footprints of any known animals etc.), but should instead realize that this figure was produced by a "rational cause" outside it (that is, a human being).[188] Although indirectly, this example portrays the kind of inscrutability that characterizes the organism: while an organism is a product of nature, its existence, much like the hexagon in the sand, cannot be explicated by the interaction of natural forces alone. For Kant then, the only way to make sense of beings like organisms is through an analogy with beings that are by design, which always presupposes final causation. Kant writes:

> For if one adduces, e.g., the structure of a bird, the hollowness of its bones, the placement of its wings for movement and of its tail for steering, etc., one says that given the mere *nexus effectivus* in nature, without the help of a special kind of causality, namely, that of ends (*nexus finalis*), this is all in the highest degree contingent: i.e., that nature, considered as a mere mechanism, could have formed itself in a thousand different ways without hitting precisely upon the unity in accordance with a rule, and that it is therefore only outside the concept of nature, not within it, that one could have even the least ground a priori for hoping to find such a rule.[189]

Before we get into Kant's solution, let us examine the two kinds of causality involved: efficient causation is linear and asymmetrical in the sense that Y, insofar as it is caused by a X that is temporally antecedent, cannot in turn cause this X. Final cause, on the other hand, is non-linear and symmetrical (or reciprocal) in the sense that Y is caused by X *as* it is also causing X.[190] The question now becomes, how does final cause help us understand organisms?

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[188] Ibid., 5:370.

[189] Ibid.5:372.

[190]" The causal nexus, insofar as it is conceived merely by the understanding, is a connection that constitutes a series (of causes and effects) that is always descending; and the things themselves, which as effects presuppose others as their causes, cannot conversely be the causes of these at the same time. This causal nexus is called that of efficient causes (*nexus effectivus*). In contrast, however, a causal nexus can also be conceived in accordance with a concept of reason (of ends), which, if considered as a series, would carry with it descending as well as ascending dependency, in which the thing which is on the one hand designated as effect nevertheless deserves, in ascent, the name of a cause of the same thing of which it is the effect." AA 5:372-5:374.

Firstly, treating an organism as if it were designed encourages us to identify the reasons behind its seemingly contingent features.[191] We can suppose that such features exist for a reason, i.e., play a determinate role in the overall functioning the whole. Secondly, reciprocal causation is better than efficient causation at describing the mutual dependency among the organs. Given the compatibility between organic structures and final causation, should we then say that organisms are intrinsically purposive, i.e., actually self-organizing? This is where Kant gets unclear as he oscillates between positions.[192] I have located two instances in the text that can speak for Kant's overall position: in the antinomy section, Kant concludes that when confronted with an organism, we should always search for mechanistic explanations as much as possible because "if it is not made the basis for research then there can be no proper cognition of nature."[193] This statement establishes the default mode of explanation regarding organisms.[194] Furthermore, Kant forbids that we attribute intentionality to nature, the full passage reads:

> In order to avoid even the least suspicion of wanting to mix into our cognitive grounds something that does not belong in physics at all, namely a supernatural cause, in teleology we certainly talk about nature as if the purposiveness in it were intentional, but at the same time ascribe this intention to nature, i.e., to matter, by which would indicate (since there can be no misunderstanding here, because no intention in the strict sense of the term can be attributed to any lifeless matter) that this term signifies here only a principle of the reflecting, not of the determining power of judgment, and is thus not meant to introduce any special ground for causality, but is only meant to add to the use of reason another kind of research besides that in accordance with mechanical laws, in order

[191] See Zukert, R. "Organism and System in German Idealism" in The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism, ed. Karl Ameriks, p.274.
[192] For analysis of Kant's oscillation regarding natural organization, see Nassar, *Romantic Empiricism: Nature, Art, and Ecology from Herder to Humbolt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp.43-49.
[193] Ibid.5:387-88.
[194] Regarding Kant's solution to the antinomy, Esposito writes: "The very fact that the maxim originates in the Understanding a priori conveys to it a kind of transcendental prestige that the second, originating from Reason, cannot possess. Also, the first maxim is supposed to apply to universal laws of "material" nature in general, laws that Kant considers "objective" and the result of a determinate judgment. The second maxim, on the other hand, is the result of "particular experiences" of Reason in its encounter with nature. Kant even suggests that the natural objects that prompted these experiences --- organic forms --- might in actuality be subject to mechanistic laws; yet, he does not suggest that opposite might be true --- that mechanistic laws be subsumed under organic ones, and that understanding nature consists of accounting for those experiences where mechanics was applicable, rather than where it was not. In short, the first maxim must be applied universally, while the second only "if opportunity offers." See Esposito, J.L. *Schelling's Idealism and Philosophy of Nature* (London: Associated Press, 1977), p. 73.

> to supplement the inadequacy of the latter even in the empirical search for all the particular laws of nature.[195]

In this carefully phrased passage, Kant makes clear that "no intention in the strict sense of the term can be attributed to any lifeless matter."[196] This means that organisms are not actually self-organizing, though we can assume self-organization on their behalf as a guideline for our research. What Kant is afraid of is the possibility of hylozoism, which he calls "the death of all natural philosophy."[197]

To conclude, Kant does not think that organism has a logos or principle of intelligibility independently from human beings because the whole of nature must be grounded in efficient causation provided by the understanding, which in turn entails that matter must remain lifeless in an absolute sense. This is why intentionality must be denied to organic nature, leading to Kant's claim that "the organization of nature is therefore not analogous with any causality that we know."[198] From these conclusions, I infer that for Kant, reason or logos, intentionality, and freedom are properties exclusive to human beings. The entirety of the cosmos is for Kant a dead object. As a consequence, the dualism between necessity and freedom is only attenuated by the reflective vs. determinative distinction, not resolved; the "incalculable gulf" between a deterministic universe and freedom of human beings remains unbridged. Under this light, I call Kant's organizationalism "partial" not only because self-organization is only limited to human beings, but more so because he rejected from the get-go the possibility of the inorganic world as organized. For our purpose, this means Kant failed to grasp life as a degree-being.

As I now turn to Schelling's complete organizationalism, it can be argued that while Kant uses human freedom to measure self-organization in nature. Schelling, on the other hand, uses self-organization to generate human freedom. The rest of the chapter will explicate how Schelling has arrived at this new approach to organization and explore, in a preliminary fashion, the implications of this reversal.

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[195] Ibid. 5:383.
[196] Note Kant's subtle oscillation here: if matter were truly dead, then of course no intention can be attributed to it, why insist on "intention in the strict sense"? Does it mean that we may attribute intention "in a loose sense" to lifeless matter?
[197] Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, 544.
[198] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:375.

As a preliminary indication of Schelling complete organizationalism, it should be clarified in advance that I do not mean for Schelling nature is itself an organism, at least not in the same way that follows our conventional understanding of the term. Instead, the thesis is that certain definitive features of nature announce themselves *through* the organism, to the extent that the primacy of mechanism must be abandoned in our attempt at understanding nature as whole. To do this, Schelling has to overcome two major obstacles: 1) to mediate or reconcile the opposition between matter and life as determined by Kant, and 2) to arrive at an immanent construal of nature without appealing anything transcendent, whether in the form of an artificer God or human spontaneity.

4.2. From Chemistry to Biology

Our common assumption about natural genesis states that first there was the world of inorganic forces and then life somehow miraculously came out of it. But if one thinks about this carefully, something about it does not make sense: how could freedom emerge from necessity, spontaneity from inertia, life from the lifeless? Is life a creation *ex nihilo*? The first issue that must be noted is that the distinction between the organic and the inorganic, as a variation of the opposition between mind and matter, is a result of reflection: we draw the distinction in our mind, apply it to the world, but only to be left confused by it.

In continuity with the anti-dualist orientation of his philosophy of nature, the core of *On the World Soul* contends that the organic and the inorganic worlds cannot be ontologically opposed: the former cannot be conceived as lacking in organization just the latter, rather than deriving it from some kind of mysterious living force, must be explained from "natural principles." Once again, the point is to grasp the opposing terms in their ontological kinship, or the intimacy by which they belong together through difference. In the preface of *On the World Soul*, it is said that the work aims to demonstrate how "one and the same principle binds inorganic and organic nature."[199] In other words, the work takes up exactly where the third *Critique* left off, namely the antinomy between mechanism and teleology. Given our analysis of Schelling's critique of dogmatism in the *Philosophical Letters*, as well as his discussion of chemical motion in the

[199] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.

Ideas, we can already expect that the "one principle" Schelling has in mind cannot be mechanism. But if it is not mechanism, is it then organism? To orient the following analysis, I highlight the following points made by Schelling: 1) organism has primacy over mechanism, and 2) this primacy is based on organism's capacity to disclose an "universal organization" that in turn makes mechanism possible. Schelling: "the world is an organization, and a universal organism is itself the condition…of mechanism."[200]

As pointed out by John Zammito, Schelling's philosophy of nature is historically contextualized by the development of German biology in the eighteenth century as a specialized inquiry into living beings emerging and therefore separating itself from the general inquiry into nature.[201] One of the key questions that emerges from this process of separation has to do with whether or not living things constitute an exception to the laws of the natural world. In Part II of *On the World Soul* entitled "On the Origin of Universal Organism," Schelling uses the contrast between two prevalent positions regarding organic nature as a way of presenting his own:

> If some amongst them assume a specifically vital force that, like some magical power, eliminates all the effects of the laws of nature in animate beings, they also thereby eliminate a priori any possibility of a physical explanation of organization.
>
> If, by contrast, others explain the origin of all organization from inorganic chemical forces, then precisely thereby they eliminate all nature's freedom in forming and organizing. The two must be combined, however.[202]

The first position characterizes the general standpoint of vitalism while the second position, standing diametrically opposed to the first, refers to materialism, most prominently represented by the chemical physiology of Johann Christian Reil.[203]

Regarding vitalism, Schelling argues that its fundamental error lies in thinking organic nature as an exception to natural laws. More specifically, vitalism posits that the organic nature is characterizable by a special vital force (*Lebenskraft*) that cannot be explained by the laws of the

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[200] Ibid.
[201] See Zammito, J. *The Gestation of German Biology: Philosophy and Physiology from Stahl to Schelling* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. 1-12.
[202] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.
[203] For a more detailed discussion of Reil's views, see Zammito, *Gestation*, pp.281-85. Also Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) pp. 255-76.

inorganic nature. For Schelling, the postulation of a vital force introduces a dualism or rift between the inorganic and the organic worlds and is therefore insufficient. But he also wants to preserve the insight of vitalism that life is irreducible to its material conditions. Regarding chemical physiology, which seeks to account for natural organization through chemical processes alone without any need of appealing to vital force, Schelling's assessment is also twofold: he acknowledges, on the one hand, chemistry's advantage over mechanism while criticizes its reductionism and limitation by a "lifeless physics."

In sum, while the vitalists are trying to grasp the positive or the emergent aspect of organization, i.e., freedom as self-determination, they have detached it from the necessary and lawful aspect of nature altogether. On the other hand, while chemical physiologists are better at grounding organization in natural processes, they have failed to heed to the emergent character of organization and thereby risks determinism.[204] Taken together, vitalists overlook nature qua necessity in exactly the way as chemical physiologists neglect nature qua freedom, neither by itself could account for nature as a whole, which must be constructed out of the unity between the two:

> Nature must neither act absolutely lawlessly (as advocates of the vital force must affirm, if they are to be consistent) nor absolutely in accordance with law (as the chemical physiologists affirm). It must rather be lawless in its lawfulness, and lawful in its lawlessness.[205]

Having presented the opposition between vitalism and chemical physiology that Schelling seeks to overcome, I now turn to Schelling's philosophical position on the possibility of "a science of life." In the last chapter, we have already seen Schelling's enthusiasm for the prospect of a "new system of chemistry" as containing the "first seeds" of a "future system of nature."[206] In *On the World Soul*, even though Schelling has become more critical towards chemistry, he does not retract his confidence in it but states that "the present work should provide the test" for its

[204] Note the similarity between Schelling's critique of vitalism and chemical physiology and his critique of Cartesian dualism and crude materialism. Just as Descartes who acknowledges the independence of the mind from matter but was unable to demonstrate how mind and matter relate to each other, vitalism too realized that there is something irreducible about life but was unable to ground life in natural laws. Similarly, chemical physiology reduces life to its chemical processes just as crude materialism reduces all mental events to physical events. In both cases, there is an imbalance in which one aspect is emphasized at the expense of the other.

[205] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant manuscript.

[206] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.149.

"extended employment."[207] As it becomes evident, Schelling's criticism of chemistry is geared toward a chemistry still trapped in a "dead physics," while what he wants is a chemistry that could join hands with biology.

In the *Ideas,* Schelling has devoted significant attention to the ways in which chemical motion resists mechanical explanations. Through the concepts of equilibrium and disequilibrium, Schelling has shown that 1) materiality is not reducible to extension, and 2) change in matter is not only external but also internal, meaning that there is a transformative dimension within materiality that mechanism has failed to grasp let alone comprehend. Most importantly, however, through his investigation into chemical motion, Schelling has taken the first step in conceiving nature less as an object and more as a subject, thereby challenging Kant's rigid opposition between matter and life that makes any reconciliation between the inorganic and organic impossible.

In contrast to Kant's complete rejection of hylozoism and the denial of any kind of endeavor to maintain itself pertaining to matter,[208] Schelling explicitly grounds chemical motion in the "endeavor of matter to escape from equilibrium" and argues that "matter…in which we presuppose no such possibility" is simply "dead matter."[209] Granted, to argue that matter is not dead is still quite far away from claiming that matter is alive (hylozoism), but the problematization of mechanism by chemical motion makes it plausible to conceive the gap between matter and life, the inorganic and the organic, as a difference in degrees rather than kind.[210] In other words, if change in matter is not only external but also internal, then matter cannot be conceived as an assemblage of homogeneous parts or atoms but should be thought instead as "internally differentiated whole" constituted by a plurality of forces acting in concert. Chemistry is therefore indispensable for understanding organic life because it shows, through the

[207] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.

[208] "The possibility of a proper natural science rests entirely and completely on the law of inertia (along with that of the persistence of substance). The opposite of this, and thus also the death of all natural philosophy, would be hylozoism. From this very same concept of inertia, as mere lifeless, it follows at once that it does not mean a positive striving to conserve its state. Only living beings are called inert in this latter sense, because they have a representation of another state, which they abhor, and against which they exert their power." Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, pp.83-84 [544].

[209] Schelling, *Ideas*, p.148.

[210] Regarding the difference between hylozoism and the philosophy of nature, Schelling writes: "The difference consists in the fact that Hylozoism postulates a primordial life in matter, whereas we do not. By contrast, we claim that matter contains life not in actu but only in potential, not explicitly by implicitly." See Schelling, Stuttgart Seminars, in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), p.215 [7444].

generation of new qualities, how changes in form and structure are caused or necessitated by internal changes occurring on the level of constitutive forces.[211]

Having presented the advantage of the chemistry over its mechanical counterpart, Schelling turns to its inadequacies. Schelling contends that even if one were to grant the thesis that life consists in chemical processes like many chemical physiologists have argued, one must at least admit that these processes are not permanent; they last only as long as their equilibrium is disrupted. But what we observe in life is precisely the opposite of this: in an organism, chemical bindings and separations never occur once and for all but are constantly being repeated *ad infinitum*. This perpetual motion of taking leave and returning to itself, concretely expressed in the *Ideas* as the constant disruption and regaining of equilibrium, is what chemical account of life must presuppose yet cannot explain:

> You must first therefore explain how and by what means nature remains a constantly disrupted equilibrium in animal bodies, by what means it inhibits the restoration of equilibrium, why it always remains just a process and never becomes a product; but it seems that no thought has been given to all this until now.[212]

As indicated in this passage, chemical explanations can only discern or describe how a particular disruption or disequilibrium occurs, but it cannot explain the "continuous restoration and destruction of equilibrium" that all living things share. In other words, chemical explanations are fragmentary because whatever processes one observes in organic nature, such as the decomposition of air in our lungs and contraction of the heart, are only a "function of life" in the sense that they already presuppose the whole they seek to explain, namely life itself.[213]

Due to this deficiency, Schelling calls for a complete reversal in our approach to chemistry:

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[211] "The essence of organization consists in the inseparability of matter and form --- because matter that is called organized is individuated to infinity. When therefore the emergence of animal matter is at issue, we require that a movement be found in which the matter of a thing emerges at the same time as its form. But original form of a thing is absolutely not something that exists in itself, nor equally its matter; both must therefore emerge in one and the same operation. But matter only emerges where a determinate quality is generated, for matter is not distinct from its qualities. Also, we only see matter emerge in chemical operations; chemical operations are therefore the only ones on the basis of which we can comprehend the formation of a matter into a determinate form." Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant manuscript.

[212] Ibid.

[213] "We not only concede, but rather affirm that the formation of animal matter is only explicable by chemical analogies, but we see that this form, where it occurs, always presupposes life itself." Ibid.

> It would be far more natural to call many chemical processes incomplete organized processes, rather than calling vegetation and life 'chemical processes', for it is more intelligible how the universal formative drive of nature finally dies away into lifeless products, than, conversely, how mechanical nature's tendency to crystallization ascends to vegetable and living forms.[214]

As stated in this passage, if the chemical account of life must presuppose life as having been organized, then it cannot function as an expository ground for why such organization is possible in the first place. In other words, if material processes cannot be employed to explain life, then life must be employed to explain material processes. With this reversal, I argue that Schelling has realized one of the key insights that remains operative throughout his philosophy of nature, extending all the way into his *Freedom Essay*, namely, the differentiation between emergence and the ground from which emergence occurs. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that while this distinction is initially reached through the relationality between organic life and its material conditions, it is not limited to the organic world but applies to nature as a whole.

A more detailed discussion of this reversal will be carried out in the later sections, for the moment, I highlight Schelling's justification for his proposal. He writes:

> It often happens, however, that when the question is raised too far for human understanding, it is redefined in more basic terms, and takes on whatever meaning one favors. This certainly makes it easier to answer, although it is now *an entirely different question* (my emphasis)…We know of course that our continued existence is dependent on the decomposition of air which occurs in our lungs, but this decomposition is itself already a function of life; yet it is life itself, the emergence of life that you are supposed to explain.[215]

As stated, Schelling argues that what affords us with the most certitude may not necessarily be the best way of explaining things. Whether it is the development of clear and distinct ideas in Descartes or Kant's insistence on mathematization as the standard for "proper science," the pursuit of self-certainty makes the questions of nature "easier to answer" but runs the risk of overlooking the complexity of nature herself. On the level of matter, mechanism reduces the

[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.

whole of matter (external and internal) into extensive relations alone, thereby changing the question of matter entirely into "dead matter." Similarly, chemical physiology, precisely because it is still trapped in a "dead physics," also changes the question of life entirely by reducing life to its functions. The problems of reductionism lead Schelling to the realization that previous theories of nature have not taken emergence into account; they have either overlooked emergence entirely or were unable to ground emergence in natural principles, both betray a failure to heed to the *logos* of nature.

4.3. Infinite Organization: Life as Immanent-Emergence

The present section aims to reconstruct the genesis of Schelling's complete organizationalism by drawing from *On the World Soul* as well as the introduction to *Ideas*. To review what has been covered thus far, I argue that the main motivation behind Schelling's complete organizationalism lies in his dissatisfaction with the way in which the divide between necessity and freedom remains unresolved by Kant. In order to truly resolve it, the real opposition that has to be overcome is the one between matter and life, the organic and the inorganic.

I shall highlight the difference between Kant and Schelling's approach to organization through the contrast between two paradigms by which nature is conceived: the former is practical, which in essence posits that nature, if it exists at all, is never independent from how the human subject makes sense of it. In contrast to this, the second paradigm is non-practical as it posits that nature by itself has a *logos* that does not depend on the human subject in order to exist (though it can be comprehended by the latter). To anticipate my conclusion, I argue that Kant, even though he has realized that organisms were irreducible to mechanical explanations, has failed to fully liberate his conception of nature from the practical paradigm; while Schelling, inspired by Leibniz, did.

In Kant's distinction between the artifact and organism, he referred to a criterion that ultimately sources back to Aristotle, namely, the location of a thing's source of motion. Briefly stated, in Book II of the *Physics,* Aristotle argues that things that come to be "by nature" have the source of motion in themselves while for technical products, their source of motion lies in the maker or

artificer.[216] In Kant's treatment however, Aristotle's "source of motion" turned into "causality of the concept," "idea," and "intentionality."[217] In other words, for Kant, an organism is not purposive or possesses any degree of spontaneity *in itself*; any agency it might have can only be a projection of our own spontaneity. In doing so, natural organization comes dangerously close to being a mere product of a self-reflecting mind. This is precisely why Schelling argues that Kant's reflective judgment is severely limited; it can only establish the "subjective necessity" of organization but does not yield the "objective necessity" that our knowing (of nature) actually demands.[218] I now turn to Schelling's interpretation of the distinction between artifacts and natural organization:

> Thus a concept lies at the base of every organization, for where there is a necessary relation of the whole to the part and of the part to the whole, there is concept. But this concept dwells in the organization itself, and is not simply, say, a work of art whose concept is to be found outside it in the understanding of the artist. Not only its form but its existence is purposive. It could not organize itself without already being organized.[219]

Here, Schelling too differentiates organisms from artifacts by appealing to their distinct sources of motion. However, Schelling is also moving beyond Kant, who restricts purposiveness to the "form" of the organism alone. Schelling, on the other hand, says that purposiveness pertains not only to an organism's form but to its "existence", meaning that for him, it is not enough to only treat organisms *as if* they were purposive, rather, they must *be* purposive in order for us to judge them as such. Schelling continues:

> For you can very easily distinguish what is arbitrary and what is necessary in the conjunction of your concepts. Whenever you conjoin things which are separated in space

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[216] Aristotle, *Physics*, 192b 8-20. Translation is taken from Sachs, *Aristotle's Physics: A Guided Study* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), p.49.

[217] "For a thing itself is an end, and is thus comprehended under a concept or an idea that must determine a priori everything that is to be contained in it…But it a thing, as a natural product, is nevertheless to contain in itself and its internal possibility a relation to ends, i.e., is to be possible only as a natural end and without the causality of the concepts of a rational being outside of it, then it is required, second, that its parts be combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form." Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 5:373-74.

[218] "For that our ideas follow one another in this precise order, that for example the lightning precedes the thunder, does not follow it, and so on, for this we do not seek the reason in us; it does not matter to us how we let the ideas follow one another; the reason must, therefore, lie in the things…Only insofar as the phenomena themselves follow one another thus and not otherwise are we compelled to represent them in this order; only because and insofar as this succession is objectively necessary is it also subjectively necessary." Schelling, *Ideas*, p.23.

[219] Ibid.,31.

> in a single aggregate, you act quite freely; the unity which you bestow on them you transfer to them simply from your thoughts; there is no reason residing in the things themselves which required you to think of them as one. But when you think of each plant as an individual, in which everything concurs together for one purpose, you must seek that reason for that in the thing outside you: you feel yourself constrained in your judgment; you must therefore confess that the unity with which you think it is not merely logical (in your thoughts), but real (actually outside you).[220]

Compared to Kant, Schelling's assessment of organic nature is more realist because the objectivity the organism asserts itself "without my participation." This means that the concept of the organism does not issue from me, instead, it is we who are delivered over to it, i.e., constrained to acknowledge it in our judgment. Furthermore, Schelling argues that if one must suppose things existing outside and independent of the reflecting mind, then one must assume "that a mind, analogous to your own, reigns in the very things outside you." It is precisely at this juncture that Leibniz appears in the text, for Schelling proceeds to state: "I cannot think otherwise than that Leibniz understood by substantial form a mind inhering in and regulating the organized being."[221]

As well-established in scholarship, substantial forms are closely associated with what Leibniz later called "monads."[222] Whereas Descartes and Newtons rejected substantial form due to its affiliation with scholasticism, Leibniz employed it to counteract what he perceived to be the shortcoming of mechanical philosophy, namely the lack of activity and unity in substances. More importantly however, Leibniz appropriated this idea from Aristotle's notion of the soul, which is why "soul" and "substantial form" often appear together in Leibniz's writings. Under this light, Schelling's mention of the substantial form can be interpreted as an attempt to break free from Kant's critical strictures towards a wider horizon. This becomes evident in the passage that immediately follows:

> This philosophy must accept, therefore, that there is a hierarchy of life in Nature. Even in mere organized matter there is life, but a life of a more restricted kind. This idea is so old,

[220] Ibid., 32.
[221] Ibid., 35.
[222] For an extensive treatment of the relationship between substantial forms and monads, see Daniel Garber, *Leibniz: Body, Substance, Monad* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

> and has hitherto persisted so constantly in the most varied forms, right up to the present day (already in the most ancient times it was believed that the whole world was pervaded by an animating principle, called the world-soul, and the later period of Leibniz gave every plant its soul) --- that one may very surmise from the beginning that there must be some reason latent in the human mind itself for this natural belief.[223]

With this passage, Schelling has given the first glimpse of what it means to think material nature from the perspective of life. As stated, nature consists of a "hierarchy of life," this means each natural being already contains or is contained by this life to a determinate degree ---- it is, rather than is not, solely due to its participation in it. This idea of universal life is made more explicit in *On the World Soul*:

> The most essential of all things…is life; the accidental is only the kind of life, and even the dead in nature is nothing dead in itself --- but is only exhausted life.[224]

The intellectual source of this idea (the world-soul as universal life), as Schelling tells us, goes back to antiquity; Schelling in fact calls it a "natural belief."[225] What I want highlight in these two passages however has to do with their link to Leibniz. In Schelling's *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, a work composed over three decades after *On the World Soul*, one finds the following passage regarding Leibniz:

> Leibniz was the first to call the world of bodies which are inorganic and generally termed 'dead' a sleeping monad world; the soul of plants and animals was for him the monad that was just dreaming, only the reasonable soul was the waking monad. Although he only expressed this gradation metaphorically, it should not be overlooked that he did so; it was the first beginning of looking at the One essence of nature in the necessary sequence of steps of its coming-to-itself, and can, as such, be regarded as the first seed of later, more living development. This side is still the most beautiful and best of Leibniz's doctrine.[226]

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[223] Ibid., 35.
[224] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.
[225] This might be an allusion to Kant's formulation of a "presentiment" given to us "by nature." Kant writes: "It must therefore be a certain presentiment of our reason, or a hint as it were given to us by nature, that we could by means of that concept of final causes step beyond nature and even connect it to the highest point in the series of causes." Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, p.219 [5:390-91].
[226] Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, tr. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 8.

Taken these passages together, it becomes evident that Leibniz was a veritable source of inspiration for Schelling's philosophy of nature, the most significant aspect of this influence being the former's dismantling of the ontological barrier between the organic and the inorganic, between matter and life that Schelling needed so desperately in order to move beyond the partial organizationalism of Kant.[227] As clearly stated in the passage just quoted, the inorganic is not "dead," which means one could assign to it a degree of life from the basis of which the entire edifice of the organic may be constructed. Furthermore, it provides Schelling with the possibility of a coherent system that extends from the inorganic to the divine based on differential degrees of intensity. I will devote the remaining portion of the present chapter as well as the next chapter to further unpack what Schelling has taken from Leibniz. To anticipate my conclusion, let us revisit this crucial sentence: "It was the first beginning of looking at the One essence of nature in the necessary sequence of steps of its coming-to-itself." What is Schelling referring to here? What is the "more living development" that ensued?

4.4. The Becoming-Life-of-Life

The particular strain of thought that Schelling was picking up in Leibniz is commonly referred to as "panorganicism." In *Monadology* §70, Leibniz writes:

> It is evident, then, that every living body has a dominating entelechy, which in animal is the soul. The parts, however, of this living body are full of other living bodies, plants and animals, which, in turn, have each one its entelechy or dominating soul.[228]

Simply put, the idea of panorganicism argues that nature is alive all the way down, or in Leibniz's words, "all of nature is full of life."[229] Now, even though I have argued that Schelling was inspired by Leibniz, I do not therefore argue that Schelling's philosophy of nature is panorganicist. The main difference between Leibniz's panorganicism and Schelling's pan-organizationalism is the idea of "progressiveness," which emphasizes continuity or commonality among beings on the one hand while retaining qualitative difference, disjuncture, and radical

[227] Zammito highlights Leibniz's significance for Schelling by writing: "In a sense radically different from Kant's, for Leibniz, too, 'a concept lies at the basis of every organization.' Leibniz found a bridge across the divide between organic and inorganic nature that blocked Kant and all the other mechanistic philosophers of science." See Zammito, *Gestation*, p.304.
[228] G VI 619/AG 222.
[229] Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and Grace* §1: G VI 598/AG 207.

leap at the same time. For the present, I turn to Schelling's positive thesis of life given what has been established between him and Leibniz.

In *On the World Soul,* Schelling presents his positive thesis on the formation of life in the following way:

> Life itself is common to all living individuals; what differentiates them is only the kind of their life. The positive principle cannot be therefore be proper to an individual, but is spread throughout all creation and pervades every single being as the common breath of nature. Just as, if we are permitted this analogy, what is common to all minds lies outside the sphere of individuality (it lies in the immeasurable, in the absolute), what differentiates mind from mind is the negative, individuating principle in each. Thus the universal principle of life individuates itself into every single living being (as in a particular world) according to the different degree of its receptivity. The whole manifold of life throughout creation lies in the unity of positive principle in all beings and the diversity of the negative principle in individuals, and this is why the proposition is true in itself, even if it is not confirmed by every single phenomenon of life or manifest in every individual.[230]

It must be restated from the outset that the above passage is not telling us that life is caused by some magical power or life-force encountering some bits of matter. In order to grasp what Schelling is really proposing, let us imagine that organisms do not exist at all or that all life forms have been wiped out from the face of the earth. What do we have left? Is the earth now a dead object? As we now know from modern scientific findings, the various processes that are indispensable to the survival of organic life on earth were underway long before the actual emergence of bio-organisms. This means that organic life has a history that infinitely extends into the inorganic (and the cosmic). It is precisely this constitutive depth that makes the earth what it is. Schelling's use "degree of receptivity" is of the uttermost importance here: one can certainly eliminate all life *in actu,* but one can never eliminate it in potentiality---why? Because life is a *degree-being* that defies the logic of existence and non-existence (or all reflectively drawn dualisms for that matter). In other words, I argue that via Leibniz, Schelling realized that a

[230] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.

degree of receptivity (to life), a degree of life itself in fact, has to be posited into the entirety of the inorganic world in order to *explain* life, since without this, one could never account for how the organic would have arisen out of the inorganic, or how organic life occurred and only occurred on earth and nowhere else.[231] To identify life only with actually living organisms is itself a denial of life; it commits the same mistake as the Megarians who thought that when a builder is not building, he would have lost the potentiality to build.[232] Thus to answer the question raised above, the earth is the earth precisely because it can never be a dead object; it can certainly be destroyed, but its destruction would be more comparable to death than merely perishing.

To summarize Schelling's complete organizationalism, it is a speculative account of how organic life could have arisen from a nature where it is allegedly absent. As our forgoing analysis has already shown, Schelling's answer is that one must first suppose the evolution of matter itself as the very *ground of life* that is intimately connected with life. As such a ground, matter precisely cannot be said to be "lifeless" as Kant has claimed. At the same time however, matter in transformation is not itself alive in the biological sense, since what is being undergone is precisely the becoming-life-of-life.

It is only when we conceive nature as a "becoming-life-of-life" does Schelling's postulation of an "universal organization" make sense. Simply stated, emergence of the organic from the inorganic is not an event that occurred in time, rather, it lies at the very beginning, constituting the inception, as it were, of the inorganic as much. In other words, for Schelling, emergence or individuation is posited all the way down as a principle of becoming. This *progressive* character is what nature has in common with freedom since it cannot be predicted in advance or constructed *a priori*: "where organization arises, nature must have acted freely."[233]

[231] Precisely because this potentiality is posited, the organic and the inorganic differ only in terms of degrees.
[232] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1046b 30. For a translation of this text, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. Joe Sachs (Sante Fe, Green Lion Press, 2019), p.170.
[233] Ibid.

Chapter V. The Autonomy of Nature

The present section is divided into two parts, part I deals Schelling's theory of natural monads and his account of organism-environment interaction as presented in *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (Hereafter: *First Outline*). Part II examines Schelling's turning away from transcendental philosophy through his criticism of Fichte. The two texts I will be looking at in Part II are: *On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems* (Hereafter: *On the True Concept*) and *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine* (Hereafter: *Statement*).

In the previous chapter, I have clarified the main theoretical motivation behind Schelling's theory of complete organizationalism, which can be summarized as an overcoming of the dualism between the inorganic and the organic in Kant. Furthermore, I have argued that Schelling has arrived at this vantage point with the help of Leibniz: what Schelling wanted to grasp through Kant's natural end but couldn't, namely, a system of living nature as originally proposed by Plato, is finally made tenable through the idea of a "self-organizing matter." In continuity with this momentous shift in perspective, Schelling announces, in the *First Outline*, that nature is autonomous and autarchic.[234] The present section is devoted to an examination of Schelling's theory of natural monads, an integral component of autonomous nature.

By analyzing his theory of natural monads, I argue that Schelling's autonomous nature rests on the foundation of infinite potentialities that do not depend on their actualization in order to be considered as real --- the infinity of its potentialities is real in itself.[235] I argue this is precisely what Schelling means when he says he aims to discover in nature "the concealed trace of freedom."[236] Furthermore, to say that nature has these potentialities might suggest, to a reflective consciousness, that nature can be something apart from this infinity of potentialities. This is a mistake. Nature is nothing in addition to its potentialities; it is a degree-being that, on the one hand, can be divided infinitely into intensities or monads, while on the other hand, it is also

[234] Interpreters have argued that the *First Outline* marks the turning point of Schelling's philosophy of nature. For example, Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler argue that the First Outline vantage point of "a purely theoretical philosophy that is in no way influenced by the practical interests of the thinking subject." See Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801: Nature and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p.155.
[235] For a comprehensive interpretation of Schelling's philosophy of nature in terms of power, see Charlotte Alderwick, *Schelling's Ontology of Power* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp.72-110.
[236] Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p.14.

continuous and indivisible as one potentiality in itself out of its infinite degrees of differentiation. Schelling: "No individual potency could produce the whole for itself, but all together can produce it."[237]

5.1.1. Preliminary Indications of Nature as Subject

Schelling presents his well-known formulation of nature as subject in the following way:

> Insofar as we regard the totality of objects not merely as a product, but at the same time necessarily as productive, it becomes Nature for us, and this identity of the product and the productivity, and this alone, is implied by the idea of Nature, even in the ordinary use of language. Nature as a mere product (*natura naturata*) we call Nature as object (with this all empiricism deals). Nature as productivity (*natura naturans*) we call Nature as subject (with this alone all theory deals).[238]

To begin, "nature as subject" should be understood in continuity with the basic project of *On the World Soul*. As presented in the last chapter, complete organizationalism entails that nature is organized infinitely, more specifically, it consists of the maxim that things are not principles of organization, but conversely, organization is the principle of things.

Furthermore, nature as subject (or rather, nature as subject-object, soul-body) entails autonomy: "Since nature gives itself its sphere of activity, no foreign power can interfere with it; all of its laws are immanent, or Nature is its own legislator."[239] If nature were nothing but product without productivity, object without subject, then the condition of its productivity would lie outside of it (e.g., an artificer God or the human mind). Conversely, insofar as an artificer of nature is denied, then nature is autonomous with regard to its production. It should be emphasized however that nature does not simply produce itself but also the space in which it is; its space or sphere of influence is an integral aspect of its self-production.

Lastly, given that nature has no outside and all of its products are finite, nature as limitless productivity must contain the principle or source of delimitation within itself as the condition of

[237] Ibid.
[238] Schelling, *First Outline*, p.202.
[239] Ibid, 17.

its self-production. Schelling illustrates this by comparing productivity to an infinitely expansive force moving at infinite speed; without an opposing force to slow it down, such productivity would have vanished immediately.

The postulation of an opposing force raises three possibilities: the negative force can be either greater than, equal to, or lesser than the positive force. The first possibility must be eliminated since nature would have never come into being if the negative were greater than the positive. Interestingly, Schelling also does not think that the negative force is lesser for the reason that the positive would have overwhelmed the negative. Once both possibilities are ruled out, the only viable solution is that the two forces are equal, but this also raises an "irresolvable difficulty," since two equal forces would cancel each other if they were to "coincide at one and the same point." Schelling writes:

> Precisely for this reason, it must be assumed that no product in nature can be the product in which those opposed activities absolutely coincide, i.e., in which Nature itself attained rest. One must, in a word, simply deny all permanence in Nature itself. One has to assume that all permanence only occurs in Nature as object, while the activity of Nature as subject continues irresistibly, and while it continually labors in opposition to all permanence.[240]

The reason for it is given in the first sentence: "no product in nature can be the product in which those opposed activities absolutely coincide." Let us image what nature would look like without any natural products (i.e., an inhospitable universe), it would be a state in which an expansion into all directions is canceled out by a contraction from all directions (one can draw an infinite number of lines from a single point just as an infinite number of lines can be drawn towards the same point). In this state, no being or product can occur since the total energy of every point in the cosmos is zero, which is why Schelling says nature would "attain rest." Now, insofar as there *are* beings, what must have happened to the forces that have cancelled themselves out at every point in the cosmos? The expansive or productive force must become infinitely curved, turned into itself in order to avoid collision and mutual cancellation. Rather than a forceless abstraction, every point in the cosmos has now become a center of gravity constituted by the interplay

[240] Ibid.

between expansion and contraction. In one leap, we have left the geometrical space of pure extension into the dynamic world of living nature.

Schelling provides a visual image of this universal curvature of the productive force by an analogy with how whirlpools are formed in stream, he writes:

> A stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance --- a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly transforming--- but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus no product in nature is fixed, but it is reproduced at each instant through the force of nature entire.

I want to emphasize how space is conceived here because I argue this depiction is related to Schelling's theory of natural actants or monads which I will turn to next. I propose that the infinite curving of forces signifies that each point in the universe is a dynamic monad.

5.1.2. "Plato's Matter" Revisited: Schelling's Theory of Natural Monads

The present section delves into Schelling's "dynamic atomism," a theoretical construction of nature developed in the *First Outline*. This theory is an 'atomism' because it assumes something simple as the constituent of matter (namely, monads or actants), at the same time, it is "dynamic" because unlike the atomists who reduces reality to material bits and explain qualities through figures and shapes, Schelling argues that nature should be better understood in terms of "degree of action."[241] Given that Schelling has already presented a version of this dynamic atomism in *On the World Soul*, my analysis will take both accounts into consideration when venturing the following claims: 1) I argue Schelling's dynamic atomism can be interpreted as a continuation of his distinction between matter and the elements in the *Timaeus Essay*, though filtered through a renewed understanding of the world-soul as nature's immanent principle of self-organization; 2) Schelling's theory of natural monads is important because it will evolve into Schelling's "system of the living" in the *Freedom Essay*.

[241] Ibid.

To begin, what are natural monads? This is not an easy question to answer, since Schelling tells us that "they don't exist" but must be "posited into nature in order to explain the originary qualities."[242] But their "non-existence" is also a good starting point for explicating what or how they are: if monads do not exist, then what exists? As it turns out, monads both exist and do not exist; both their existence and non-existence is a matter of degree (or in Schelling's formulation, they are the "inception of the product"). To demonstrate this, I proceed to the passage that communicates most directly the intention behind his monadology:

> If the evolution of Nature were ever complete (which is impossible), then after the general decomposition of each product into its factors nothing would be left other than simple factors, i.e., factors which are no longer themselves products. Therefore, these simple factors can only be thought as originary actants, or --- if it is permissible to express it this way --- as originary productivities.[243]

Recall how, in the previous chapter, it was said that even if the entirety of actually existing life were to be wiped out, there would still be life in the universe, Schelling is asking us to carry out a similar experiment here: if all natural products were reduced or thoroughly decomposed to infinity, what would remain in Nature? Will there be nothing left? An atomist would say, once all products are dissolved, atoms should still be there. But this is unacceptable to Schelling, because an atom, insofar as it is extended, is still a product, while the thinking experiment calls for the dissolution of all products or *natura naturata*. This is Schelling's way of proving that mechanical atoms cannot be the ultimate constituent of the universe. But if not atoms, then what remains?

Insofar as we call extended things "existing" or "actual," once all extended things are reduced (which is impossible), what remains is a tapestry of infinite potentialities or "intensities"[244] (to risk an awkward phrasing, they can be called "freedoms"). In order to explicate what Schelling is trying to accomplish, let us apply the same thought experiment to Kant's critical philosophy. In the Transcendental Aesthetic. Kant writes:

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[242] Ibid., 21.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Other than monads, Schelling also calls them "actants," "activities," "pure entelechy," "originary productivities," and "inception of the product."

> If I separate from the representation of a body that which the understanding thinks about it, such as substance, force, divisibility, etc., as well as that which belongs to sensation, such as impenetrability, hardness, color, etc., something from this empirical intuition is still left for me, namely extension and form. These belong to the pure intuition, which occurs *a priori*.[245]

Although both Schelling and Kant are performing a kind of abstraction from experience in order to disclose a more originary dimension of being, the result is drastically different: for Kant, once the input of understanding and sensation are removed, what is left is space though understood as the *a priori* form of pure intuition. For Schelling on the other hand, once all natural products (or objects of outer intuition in Kantian terms) are decomposed, what remains are pure potentialities or capacities-for-being (*Seynkönnendes*).

To a remarkable extent, Schelling's theory of natural monads can be seen as a further development of his distinction between matter and the elements in the *Timaeus Essay*. Like matter, the monads are too invisible and non-extended. More importantly however, monadic association is responsible for all intensive organizations in the cosmos, just as matter, once informed, produces the elements that are responsible for all qualitative variations.

Different from matter in the *Timaeus* however, monads do not require the external imposition of the forms as a condition for their being --- they organize themselves through conflict:

> Each organism is itself nothing other than the collective expression for a multiplicity of actants, which mutually limit themselves to a determinate sphere. This sphere is something perennially enduring --- not something merely fading into the background as appearance --- for it is that which originates in the conflict of actants, the monument, as it were, of those activities prehending one another; it is the concept of that change itself, which is the only enduring thing in the change. In all the lawlessness of the actants continuously jostling one another, there yet remains the lawful aspect of the product itself, which they (and no others) are constrained among themselves to produce; as a result, the perception of the organism as a product, in which what it is it is through itself -

[245] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. & ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 156 [B 35, A 21].

-- which is simultaneously cause and effect of itself, means and end --- will be justified as in accordance with Nature.[246]

To begin, Schelling speculates that there must be a horizon of reciprocal causation that makes monadic interaction possible, for he posits that each monad is characterized by a "tendency to free development" and it is due to this activity that each monad is also receptive to being constrained by all other monads.[247] This reciprocity between activity and receptivity ensures that the whole of the cosmos is in constant fluctuation and hence conflict. As all monads are constrained to relate to each other, a certain regularity emerges. Schelling relates this regularized movement to the formation of a "determinate sphere." Furthermore, while the monads contained by the sphere are fleeting and impermanent, the sphere itself, as the whole these movements together articulate, is permanent and stable, which is why Schelling also calls it the "concept" of the phenomena in the sense that the latter is precisely contained (*begriffen*) in it. In other words, there is a union between structure and movement, the unchangeable and the changeable in any organization.[248]

It should be noted that this is Schelling's response to Kant's theory of organism: whereas Kant cannot conceive how an organism causes itself, Schelling's account seems to rely on the idea of spontaneous origination. Under this model, the entire cosmos is can be interpreted as self-organizing as Schelling argues that space or nature is filled "from inside out."[249] Finally, insofar as each monad has a tendency to freely develop, a degree of agency or soul (as being its own source of motion) must be attributed to them.

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[246] Ibid.51.

[247] "In every individual actant is an activity that strives to freely develop --- according to its nature. Its receptivity for or restrictedness by all others, really lies in this tendency to free development." Ibid.,34.

[248] Schelling was already working out this idea in *On the World Soul*: "What is a concept is for that very reason something fixed, at rest, the monument of passing phenomena; the changeable in that product would be the phenomena whose product they are; the unchanging would be the concept alone (a determinate sphere) that these phenomena are incessantly necessitated to express. There is an absolute union of the changeable and the unchanging in this whole." *On the World Soul*. Grant Manuscript.

[249] Schelling, *First Outline*, p.25.

5.1.3. Organism-Environment

The present section deals with the relationship between organism and environment as presented in the *First Outline*.

As already discussed, Schelling is working with the assumption that nature is completely organized, which means all individual beings are members of this organization as parts to a whole. Furthermore, Schelling argues that universal organization is not very tolerant towards individuals or particular organizations, since the latter strives to be permanent whereas the former "labors in opposition to all permanence."[250] By setting universal and particular organization in inimical terms, Schelling implies that individuality, organism, and life are aberrations to the general course of nature: by itself, particular organization should not have happened; its very existence therefore demands an explanation --- "How can any individual nature hold its own against the universal organism?"[251] This is the guiding question that structures Schelling's analysis of the organism-environment interaction.

Schelling first posits that an individual organism can only survive in nature if it duplicates or mirrors the organizing activity of nature:

> No individuality in Nature can, as such, maintain itself, unless it begins, just like the absolute organism, to assimilate everything for itself, to encompass everything within its sphere of activity. In order that it not be assimilated, it must assimilate; in order that it not be organized, it must organize.[252]

Here, the relationship between individual and universal organization is joined together through the notion of assimilation: nature tries to assimilate the organism just as the organism tries to assimilate *it*. To "assimilate" means to convert difference into sameness, to turn what is outside into what is inside. But the most crucial aspect of the assimilative activity has to do with the subsumption of power: when A assimilates B, A must convert B's powers into a means of self-expansion, transformation, or growth. Schelling summaries the activity of assimilation as the conversion of what is a subject into an object. Under this light, when assimilation is mutual or reciprocal, it also articulates space: when the individual is considered as the subject or source of

[250] Schelling, *First Outline*, p.17.
[251] Ibid.,54.
[252] Ibid.

assimilation, the outside is the environment, which is the object of assimilation. Conversely, when the universal organism is considered as the source, then the individual is the outside or the object.

Individual	Universal
Subject of assimilation →	Object of assimilation
Object of assimilation ←	Subject of assimilation

As already discussed in Chapter III, a matter-on-matter interaction is purely external because it is simply two objects smashing into each other. In contrast, the organism-environment interaction always requires a reciprocity between the two terms: a passivity or receptivity is posited in the organism when an activity that compliments it is posited in nature, the two form an integrated horizon in which both are positive in themselves but are "positive and negative" in relation to each other.[253] Schelling illustrates this reciprocity through the example of poisoning:

> A poison acts upon the animal body. To what extent is it a poison, and why is it a poison? Is it a poison in itself? Hardly. For example, smallpox is a poison only once for each person; snake venom is not poisonous for the snake. Poison is not poison at all except to the extent that the body makes it so. For poison as poison the body has no receptivity, except to the degree that it is active against it. Poison does not attack the body, but the body attacks the poison.[254]

As stated, poison is not something poisonous in itself; it only becomes poisonous when it comes into contact with determinate processes in the organism that are receptive to it. This means the organism must play a more active role in our understanding of how poisoning occurs since it cannot be simply passive. Schelling's formulation gets to the point: "Poison does not attack the

[253] "The external world does not act upon the inner factor as the external acts upon the external (dead thing upon dead thing). An external thing acts on an inner one only insofar as it engages negatively in its positive activity, or (what is the same) in the negative activity positively. But also conversely, the inner takes the outer into itself only because its activity in relation to it becomes positive or negative." Ibid.55.
[254] Ibid., 56.

body, but the body attacks the poison." It is only because the organism has the power to assimilate substances from the external world is it in turn vulnerable to being poisoned. In order for poisoning (X) to occur, one must posit the poison's activity to harm the organism (+A) as well as the organism's power to digest the poison (-A). Schelling writes: "Both effects (+A and -A) are positive. They are only positive and negative in relation to one another insofar as they reciprocally hold the equilibrium."[255]

Having established the reciprocity between organism and environment, Schelling delves into a more detailed explication of their relationship based on the concept of excitability (*Erregbarkeit*), which he considers to be the cipher of organic nature. Dead matter is not excitable, organisms are. Schelling writes: "For, in terms of receptivity to external influences, it cannot be distinguished from the inorganic. In contrast, the living distinguishes itself from the dead only in that the latter is receptive to every impression, but the former is antecedently determined by its own nature to be a special sphere of receptivity."[256]

Organism: Excitable - indirectly effected by external nature

"Dead" matter: Unexcitable - directly effected by external nature

From the principle of excitability, Schelling deduces that nature must produce, in the organic world, the opposite effect of what it tends to produce in the inorganic world. For example, in inorganic nature, heat causes a rise in temperature and nothing else. But in organic nature, heating up causes the organism to cool itself down (homeostasis).[257] In other words, an organism is not simply impacted but is instead "excited" or "stimulated" in the sense that it precisely strives against external influences that seek to eliminate it. In short, the organism is its own object, meaning that it is for itself as it "constructs itself (as object) only under duress from an outer world."[258]

In the forgoing analysis, it becomes evident that the organism is both dependent on as well as independent from external nature. Although it is contained in nature as an object among others,

[255] Ibid.,55
[256] Ibid.,66.
[257] There is a rise in temperature in the environment; it heats up the organism. The organism can only be heated up if heat matters to it, i.e., if temperature plays a role in its self-maintenance. Precisely for this reason, the organism cannot be heated up infinitely without destroying the balance of forces that precisely constitutes it as an organism.
[258] Schelling, First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature,

its mode of inclusion or containment is characterized by a for-itself-ness that, as long as it lasts, is inaccessible to the reduction to nature:

> If the external world could determine the organism as subject then it would cease to be excitable. Only the organism as object is determinable through external influences, the organism as subject must be unreachable by them.[259]

As stated, external nature is determinative of the organism only to a certain degree, namely, as an object. What it cannot reach, as long as the individual organism lasts, is precisely that center of activity or the subjective aspect of the organism. This is so because the subjective dimension of the organism is precisely that which seeks to assimilate or organize external nature. Corresponding to this, the individual thing is also both inside and outside nature. It is inside nature insofar as it is conditioned by the totality of processes that are operative in nature. At the same time, however, the individual is also outside nature because it has its own sphere of activity that, on the one hand, keeps nature's various reductive processes at bay while assimilating parts of external nature for itself. In short, even though organisms thoroughly belong to nature as a part or member to a whole, its membership is determined by the extent of its resistance: organism poses an exception to the "will of nature."[260]

For the remaining portion of the section, I will focus on the reciprocity between activity and receptivity that conditions individual development. According to Schelling, at the beginning of an individual existence, there is a maximum of receptivity and minimum activity, meaning that an organism is largely dependent on the various processes supporting it. As the individual matures, we see an overall increase in activity and a decrease in receptivity:

> Nature seeks to transform the receptivity of the organism to the external world, which is a determinate one, into an absolute one --- but in doing so its receptivity is instead increasingly lessened, and in the same relation by which activity increases. In this way the organism achieves always greater independence from the influences of external nature --- but the more it is independent of them, the less it is excited by them. Now, however, this excitability is, through external influences and the receptivity to them, a condition of life and organic activity: thus organic activity is extinguished along with

[259] Ibid., 106.
[260] Ibid., 62.

> organic receptivity. In this manner Nature achieves its aim, but in a completely roundabout way --- and indirectly through organic activity itself.[261]

As the organism grows, it becomes more active and therefore more independent from nature. However, independence comes at a price: the more independent a being becomes, the less excitable it is to its environment, but excitability is precisely the "condition of the life and organic activity." In other words, the moment an organism is no longer receptive to or excited by nature, or when nature's pressure against it has become less effective, it would lose its vitality as well --- complete independence does not deliver the organism from its dependency on nature but precisely demonstrates it.

Schelling's investigation into organism is significant for several reasons: 1) it grounds the possibility of consciousness in organic processes; 2) it provides a basis for thinking how humans may relate to their environment; 3) it provides clue to how to interpret the theme of "instrumentalization" in the *Freedom Essay* between universal will and the will of the creatures, 4) it prepares for a way into Schelling's theory of potentiation, which I will address next. In short, I claim Schelling's monadology, along with his theory of organism, are different components of his panorganizationalism under which subjectivity can be reconstrued in terms of activity or power that creates its own sphere of activity by which an outside is also generated in relation to it.

Chapter V. Part II.

5.2.1. Potentiation-depotentiation as Method and Critique

One significant current that emerges with the *First Outline* is Schelling's turning away from transcendental philosophy. In the Introduction that was published one month after the *First Outline*, Schelling writes that there is "no place" in the philosophy of nature for idealistic methods of explanation that transcendental philosophy provides, since for the latter, nature is

[261] Ibid., 68.

"nothing more than the organ of self-consciousness."[262] The present section focuses on this shift through Schelling's critique of Fichte.

In *On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems* (hereafter: *On the True Concept*), Schelling presents a defense as well as a clarification of his philosophy of nature through a response to Eschenmayer's review of the *First Outline*. This text, along with several essays immediately followed it, are not only crucial to understanding the period of intellectual development known as Schelling's identity philosophy (which I will not get into in the present thesis), but also to understanding how Schelling saw his philosophy of nature to be fundamentally divergent from the transcendental philosophy of Fichte and Kant.

I argue that depotentiation functions in Schelling as both method as well as critique; it is a "method" because it aims to construct the movement of nature as degrees of the subject-object (or the becoming-life-of-life); it is a "critique" because this construction is impossible as along as one remains within the position of a fully constituted consciousness.

Schelling's response to Eschenmayer's review begins with the correction of two misunderstandings that are generally associated with his philosophy of nature: 1) it consists of a transcendental deduction of natural phenomena, and 2) it reduces all specific changes and differences in matter to degrees of density. Both misunderstandings are related to the idealist understanding of nature to which Eschenmayer's review positions Schelling, suggesting that although Schelling thinks he has moved beyond idealism, it still remained, and must remain, within the parameter of (Fichtean) idealism that Eschenmayer endorses.[263] But Schelling reminds Eschenmayer that he knows the idealist position all-too-well and the whole reason for his differentiation between philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* issues from a deeper disagreement regarding the nature of the absolute.

For Schelling, Fichte and Eschenmayer were unable to grasp the fundamental difference between his philosophy of nature and transcendental idealism because they cannot let go of the subjective element of intellectual intuition. Schelling thus begins his defense of philosophy of nature by

[262] Ibid., 194.
[263] A. C. A. Eschenmayer, "Spontaneity = World Soul, or the Highest Principle of the Philosophy of Nature," in *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801: Nature and Identity*, Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler, tr. Judith Kahl and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp.17-45.

drawing a distinction between philosophy on philosophizing and philosophy as such. The former is a characterization of Fichteanism while the latter is his own. While philosophy as such asks about the identity between subject and object, philosophy on philosophizing asks about the condition of this identity. Formulated in a different way, Fichte equates the knowing of being with the knowing of knowing; the problem with this approach lies in the limitation reflection imposes on objectivity, more especially, it has to do with the fundamental covering over of the history or ground of self-consciousness due to self-consciousness' very occurrence. Schelling writes:

> As long as I maintain myself in this potency while philosophizing, I can behold nothing objective than in the moment of its entry into consciousness….and no longer in its original coming-into-being at the moment of its first emergence.[264]

In order to understand what Schelling means by objectivity in its "original coming-into-being," one must first unpack how it contrasts with objectivity determined by consciousness. For Schelling, insofar as Fichte posits the self-positing of the absolute I as the highest principle of philosophy, it structurally depends on the perpetual identity of that which acts (the object of philosophizing) and that which intuits and reflects on this activity (the subject of philosophizing). Yet, what Fichte does not seem to realize about his own system is that insofar as the productive or active aspect of the self requires reflection to be fully constituted, it by itself precisely cannot be I or consciousness. Schelling writes: "It therefore takes its object (that which acts and produces) already to be I, although it has only first become I at that moment when reflection posits it as identical with it."[265] The word "becomes" is crucial here, for Schelling is saying that although the Fichtean I claims to be immediate, all of its determinations are retroactive. This reliance on reflection means that Fichteanism can only identify subjectivity with the perspective of a fully constituted consciousness and objectivity as what is for this consciousness. To get out this "circle of consciousness," Schelling proposes to "depotentiate" the object of all philosophizing from the highest potency of a "completed consciousness" to its first or inceptive

[264] Schelling, *On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of solving its Problems*, in *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801: Nature and Identity*, Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler, tr. Judith Kahl and Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p.49.
[265] Ibid.

potency.[266] Furthermore, he says that depotentiation as a removal of the subjective element in intellectual intuition, is impossible without abstraction.

As already discussed in the previous chapters, Schelling characterizes existence as the development of interconnected levels of "potencies" or stages of self-organization. But if potentiation characterizes the movement of beings as a whole from inorganic to consciousness, why does philosophy require depotentiation (retrieve, repetition)? As it turns out, what comes with the attainment of subjectivity qua self-consciousness is a simultaneous constitution of objectivity qua nature. Schelling argues that when being reaches its highest potency through self-consciousness, it automatically places a filter on our perception of being: "From the standpoint of consciousness, nature appears to me as objective and the I as subjective."[267] What Fichteanism does not take into account is precisely this filter structurally implemented in self-consciousness: as subjectivity is identified as self-consciousness, it takes agency or power from nature by pronouncing the latter to be merely objective. In other words, by privileging self-consciousness as the horizon of being, Fichte has excluded nature, as the history or ground of self-consciousness, from his system. In light of this, when Schelling says that he wants to intercept beings at their "original coming-into-being at the moment of its first emergence," he means that philosophy must begin with the "non-conscious activity" of nature as the first potency of the subject-object identity.

These remarks prepare us for a more in-depth discussion on depotentiation as a method unique to Schelling's philosophy of nature. As already indicated, depotentiation requires abstraction, but abstraction of what kind? As formulated by Berger and Whistler, abstraction is a method originally explored by Fichte that functions by taking away from the object of intuition to isolate the intuiting activity itself.[268] The fundamental motive of this kind of abstraction is Cartesian, since the goal of this method is to locate the pure subjective element that, in showing to be un-abstractable, grounds being. In comparison, Schelling's abstraction is precisely the opposite of

[266] Ibid.,50.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler characterize the Fichtean kind of abstraction as "Cartesian" in contrast to Schelling's abstraction as "an indifferent epochē," See *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy, 1801: Nature and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p.170.

Fichte's since it uses the removal of the subjective element as a means to arrive at identity (or degree-being).

The fundamental difference between Fichte and Schelling's mode of abstraction concretely cashes out on their stance on objectivity. As already stated, Schelling wants a more robust account of objectivity beyond its dependence on consciousness. More precisely, his philosophy of nature is driven by the necessity to intercept beings at their "original coming-into-being at the moment of its first emergence."[269] Schelling points out that for Fichte who could only think from the perspective of a complete consciousness, the real is the same as the objective. But for one who can perform the depotentiating abstraction, the objective (i.e., nature) is simultaneously the "real and ideal" or what he refers to in the above passage as pure subject-object. By doing so, Schelling dismantles or deconstructs the dualism that lies at the core of Fichte's thinking: the opposition between nature and freedom.

	Nature	Freedom
Fichte: objective=real, subjective=ideal		
Schelling: object=real and ideal, subjective=real and ideal		

As shown in the diagram, from the perspective of idealism, being consists of a dualist framework with nature/matter/real on the objective side and consciousness/mind/ideal on the subjective side. This perspective can only explain the subject-object interaction by privileging the subjective over the objective. Against this limitation, Schelling argues that the subjective and the objective distinction cannot be mapped unto nature and consciousness. Instead, both realms are equally subject-object. By this move, Schelling solves the question of how intelligence could have arisen out of matter by positing that matter and mind are constituted by the same dynamic, though at a different potency. Schelling elaborates that when he writes, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* that the task of the philosophy of nature is to derive the subjective from the objective,

[269] Ibid. 49.

he means to "let the subject-object OF CONSCIOUSNESS emerge from the PURE subject-object."[270]

If the pure subject-object of nature only becomes objective through the emergence of self-consciousness, then by removing the epistemological filter generated by the realization of the highest potency, what is left is the purely objective element. But as generally acknowledged in deconstruction, reversing the terms within a dualism is not the same as transforming it. Thus by abstracting the subjective from intellectual intuition, Schelling does not mean getting rid of the subject altogether, but only uncouples the identification between subjectivity and a fully constituted consciousness. Once this depotentiating abstraction is undertaken, what is formerly regarded as objective exhibits its own subjectivity (i.e., its degree of indifference), or what Schelling is calling the "pure subject-object." Furthermore, it shows itself as that which is responsible for the eventual identification of subjectivity with consciousness but is therefore precisely something that is not reducible to consciousness. Thus Schelling states that what he calls nature or pure subject-object is nothing but what the transcendental philosopher posits as = I. The crucial difference being that this pure subject-object constitutes the ground from which the subject-object of consciousness emerges.

Towards the end of the essay, Schelling draws the conclusion that follows from his deconstruction of Fichtean idealism: while Fichte and Eschenmayer identify spontaneity or freedom with the spirit alone, for him spontaneity is the defining characteristic of nature itself, a principle he refers to as the "active soul of nature." No longer a mere object or the totality of objects, nature is now the pure subject-object that is itself free. This energizing of the objective turns Fichteanism on its head and constitutes a new departure point for philosophy. What has been made possible by this deconstruction and simultaneous empowerment is a view into being in its entirety, since Schelling can now construct the genesis of the cosmos from ground zero (potency 0).

> To make the subject-object in this way objective, and to generate it from itself to the point where it coincides as one with nature (as product). The point where it becomes nature is also that where the unlimitable in it raises itself to the I and where the

[270] Ibid.,50.

> opposition between I and nature, which is made in ordinary consciousness, completely disappears, so that nature = I and I = nature. At this point where everything which is still activity (not product) in nature is transferred into the I, nature endures and lives only in this I which henceforth is one and all and in it everything is contained. And it is at precisely this point that idealism begins.[271]

As this passage makes clear, Schelling's philosophy of nature seeks to ground Fichtean idealism by taking being all the way to the emergence of the I. This grounding is made possible only through reducing the subjective and objective to their point of identity in which nature = I and I = Nature. In other words, nature and consciousness have to be un-differentiated before their differentiation can be accounted. Schelling's depotentiating abstraction shows that de-subjectivation comes hand in hand with the potentiation of the objective.

If the realization of self-consciousness comes at the expense of obscuring its own foundation, the task of philosophy cannot take the form of a knowing of knowing. Instead, philosophy must be a knowing of being, which now take the concrete shape of fathoming the non-conscious activity of nature as the history or ground of self-consciousness. The entire discussion on depotentiation is geared toward establishing the necessity of the philosophy of nature as a more primordial form of inquiry than Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. Thus, to the question which of the two --- transcendental philosophy or the philosophy of nature --- has priority, the answer is decidedly the latter because it "lets the standpoint of idealism itself first come into being, and thereby provides for it a secure, purely theoretical foundation." Idealism can only begin where the philosophy of nature ends ---this is Schelling's message to Fichte.

5.2.2. The Principle of Non-nature

In 1806, five years after his decisive break with Fichte, Schelling writes the following remarks about his former philosophical mentor and co-champion of German idealism:

> If *Schwärmerei* can be called an unalterable striving to establish his subjectivity through his subjectivity and as generally valid [and] to extirpate all of nature while installing non-

[271] Ibid.,54.

> nature as the principle and all the extremes of a one-sided education in their most hideous isolation as scientific truths --- then who has in the true sense *geschwärmt* longer and louder than precisely Herr Fichte?[272]

The charge of *Schwärmerei* launches an attack on what Schelling calls the "subjectivization [*Subjektivirung*]" of reason, an error which he calls the *proton pseudos* of philosophy. As our forgoing discussion has indicated, Schelling sees the identity between subject and object, the knower and the known to be paramount. Without showing that there is an original nexus between the two spheres, knowledge in general is vulnerable to skepticism. Yet, previous attempts at this unity, namely Kantianism and Fichteanism, have fallen short: Kant's thing in itself reintroduces dualism and skepticism while Fichte simply displaced the site of philosophy from the knowing of being into a knowing of consciousness. Schelling characterizes the Fichtean perspective as follows: insofar as the subject and object identity is knowable at all, it involves consciousness, which means this identity is a product of my knowledge and object of thought for me. Therefore, a knowing of myself qua self-consciousness is the knowing of absolute identity. Whereas in Fichte the absolute identity is always for myself in the sense that it exists only in my knowledge and never independent from it, for Schelling the matter is the opposite: the absolute is not for me but I am for it. Schelling writes: "it is not me who recognizes this identity, but it recognizes itself, and I am merely its organ."[273] Virtually all the determining notions in this period of Schelling's thinking are centered on this reversal, which adamantly rejects any foundation of reason in the human subject.

From Schelling's perspective, he and Fichte agree on the general determination of the vocation of philosophy as the "knowledge and science of the divine," but he disagrees with Fichte on where the divine is, for Fichte claims that the eternal can be only apprehended by thought. Schelling writes:

> We want to explain this from another perspective for he who admits that God or the eternal can be grasped in thought. If he is really thinking of God, then he is thinking of

[272] Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*. Trans. Dale Snow. (SUNY Press, p.43 [I, 7, 47].

[273] "Because the philosopher of nature raises nature to self-sufficiency and lets it construct itself, he never has cause to oppose it to constructed nature (i.e., experience) nor to correct it according to [constructed nature]." Schelling, *On the True Concept*, p. 57.

> him as that which alone is reality [and] is essentially Being. God can therefore not be in the world of thought unless it is the only positive [reality] of an actual or natural world, and there is, with respect to it, absolutely no contradiction between an ideal and a real world, the other world and this world…He will wait in vain both now and in the future for another world to appear in which God is in a special sense real, other than the present and so-called real world, and if God is not the reality in it, then he is no reality whatsoever, that is, he would not be God.[274]

As indicated, insofar as philosophy aspires to be a knowledge of the divine, any dualism is unphilosophical, since to assert the divine is only present in thought amounts to denying the reality of the natural world, which furthermore denies God as the only actuality or reality there is. At the same time, if the being or reality of God cannot be sought in a supersensible world, that is, in a world that is "more real" that the present one, then all philosophy is essentially the philosophy of nature. Schelling writes: "Thus if philosophy is the science of the divine as the only positive, then it is the science of the divine as the only reality in the real or world of nature, that is, it is essentially philosophy of nature."[275]

For Schelling, Fichte's treatment of nature as the not-I means that nature is nothing but the totality of conditioned beings that requires a further ground for their existence. Insofar as this ground cannot be itself sensible, it must be supersensible, which is only accessible if not identical with the mind. Schelling argues that treating nature as conditioned is the equivalent of treating it as non-existent, because its being is paled by the supersensible as the real ground of existence. In his parody of Fichte's *On the Vocation of the Scholar*, Schelling identifies two abuses of nature operative in Fichteanism, both are derived from treating Nature as not-I : the first abuse is to turn nature into a means to satisfy human practical interests while the second aestheticizes nature into kitsch.[276] Both senses are rooted in treating nature as an "organ" or "medium" of self-consciousness as discussed in the *First Outline*. Schelling then compares Fichte to the Nestor, the protagonist from Tieck's play "Prinz Zerbino":

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[274] Schelling, *Statement*, p.29.

[275] Ibid.

[276] "But nature should not be merely useful and exploitable for man, which is its first purpose and the economic viewpoint, but rather, 'it should surround him with dignity,' that is (how can one otherwise interpret this?) it should be transformed into sophisticated gardens and properties, beautiful houses and proper furnishings, which is its second purpose and the aesthetic perspective on nature." Ibid.,98.

> The philosophical Nestor reminds us quite involuntarily of another Nestor, the one in "Prinz Zerbino." Having returned in a very bad mood from the garden of poetry, where the forest, the flowers and the winds had spoken, rendering him quite confused, he was then overjoyed as he heard the table, the chair, and the other furniture speaking, for they were not trees and flowers, but rather things that had come into being through rational action, and were happy to be useful amenities and no longer have to stand outside and rustle in the wind as miserable green trees, which would not be to the benefit of any rational being.[277]

Nestor's story is not only illustrative of what Schelling perceives to be the flaw of Fichteanism, but also of the failure of modernity in relation to nature. Note the correlation between Nestor's abysmal confusion in comprehending the logos of nature and his uttermost delight in hearing the speech of the artifacts, it can be said that under modernity, it is as if the entirety of nature strives to evolve into useful objects, to become actualized, fixed in place, and forever leave its state of nature behind. Even Kant's third *Critique* resorted to this practical impulse as he could not conceive natural organization without introducing causality by concept as a supplement.

Against this view, Schelling argues that there is only one reality, which is the absolute. And because it is the absolute, it cannot be posited in the mind alone. Fanaticism is simply the positing of a separate world, a sect or fraction that threatens to take over the whole ---- to think God is somewhere else than the reality in which one lives is, in a word, evil. For Schelling, evil is precisely the burden a "purely human reason" must bear for its hubris.[278]

What can be concluded from Schelling's turn from transcendental philosophy? Simply stated, philosophy of nature is no longer an offshoot of transcendental philosophy as it might have been in the *Ideas*; it is no longer the counterpart to transcendental philosophy as in *System of Transcendental Idealism*, nor is it the more primary ground of transcendental philosophy as

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[277] Ibd.,14.

[278] "Doctor Luther and his contemporaries called those persons fanatics and fanatical spirits who presented a certain connection and series of principles that were grounded only in their individuality and were held together through their own subjectivity, but had neither in themselves nor in their nature an objective ground or connection and made their claims only on the basis of their subjectivity. Everything which is merely subjective yet wants to be taken for truth seeks to replace and disguise the character of inner universal validity with the external appearance of universal validity, that is, it strives to makes itself the object of all subjects, in a word, it takes sides. He is a fanatic who in this manner forms a group of fanatics, a sect; the sect founder." Ibid., 41.

suggested in *On the True Concept*. Instead, I argue that the fruit of Schelling's break with Fichte lies in the thorough and unmistakable identification of philosophy of nature with philosophy as such, but only if we consider philosophy in general as the knowledge of the divine. Conversely, philosophy qualifies as the knowledge of the divine only insofar as it becomes a philosophy of nature. The intimacy between nature and God will become the basic starting point of Schelling's *Freedom Essay* which I now turn to.

Chapter VI. From Inspiration to Revelation: Freedom Essay

Only one who has tasted freedom can feel the longing to make everything analogous to it, to spread it throughout the whole universe.

F. W. J. Schelling

The good man orders himself in relation to the whole, and the wicked man orders the whole in relation to himself. The latter makes himself the center of all things, the former measures his radius and keeps to the circumference. Then he is ordered in relation to the common center, which is God, and in relation to all the concentric circles, which are the creatures.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

6.1. Preamble

Schelling's opening lines to the *Freedom Essay* announces the movement of the entire treatise:

> Philosophical investigations into the essence of human freedom can in part address the correct concept of freedom in so far as the fact of freedom, no matter how immediately the feeling of which is imprinted in every individual, lies in no way so fully on the surface that, in order to merely to express it in words, an uncommon clarity and depth of mind would not be required; in part, they can deal with the connection of this concept with the whole of a scientific worldview.[279]

As stated, the movement of the *Freedom Essay* is to develop the correct concept of freedom from the feeling of freedom. The feeling of freedom is not something merely subjective, since it is "immediately imprinted in every individual" as what all human beings have in common. What is not common to all, however, is the distance between this feeling and the "fact of freedom" in each individual, given that the latter does not rest on the surface and therefore requires work. More specifically, it requires a kind of work unique to philosophy itself, namely, to bring something hitherto concealed into the clarity of the concept.[280]

One may already pause here and ask: other than the feeling of freedom, what else do all human beings have in common? Recalling Schelling's discussion of feeling in the *Ideas*, it is through a feeling of nature that human freedom announces itself to itself. More precisely, what Schelling is going to say about freedom in the *Freedom Essay* ---- bringing the feeling of freedom into speech as a way of disclosing the fact that freedom is, rather than is not --- has been already under way in his philosophy of nature. In other words, we have a feeling of nature just as we have a feeling of freedom; the two are not distinct feelings but are instead profoundly interwoven, which in part accounts for the obscurity of freedom that Schelling now speaks.

Schelling states in the Preface that up until the composition of the *Freedom Essay*, he "has confined himself wholly to investigations in the philosophy of nature," an endeavor that allowed him to turn to what he now calls the "first" in which he would present his "concept of the ideal part of philosophy with complete determinateness."[281] These remarks suggest that the progression from nature to freedom is not arbitrary but are warranted by the subject matter itself.

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[279] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, p.9 [SW 336-337].
[280] Schelling calls this process "self-creation" [*Selbstbildung*]. "The process of self-creation always involves our raising to consciousness what exists in us in unconscious form, to turn our innate darkness into light, in short, to attain a state of clarity." Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," p.207.
[281] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, p.4 [OA VIII-XII]

The message being: we have no idea of what human freedom is without a prior investigation into nature; the development of the correct concept of freedom (not merely human freedom) comes hand in hand with the development of the concept of nature as the two have stemmed from the common source.

Having said that, if we were to apply Schelling's interpretative framework of freedom to nature (i.e., feeling, fact, concept), what is the correct concept of nature? Has it already been developed? Stated in a preliminary fashion, the correct concept of nature is nature as a living system, or a whole in which all parts "stand together" (*sunhistamai*) in dynamic unity. This idea reached its culmination in the *First Outline* with the announcement of nature as unconditioned, meaning that nature has come to itself as subject. The question now beckons: how does the essence of human freedom, a question pertaining to ethics, stand in relation to a nature that is fully autonomous and autarchic?

Schelling seems to be occupied by this very question when he says that the concept of freedom cannot be "defined in isolation" and must be connected with "the whole of a scientific worldview."[282] More specially, the introduction of freedom into the system would have a profound effect on the system itself, for Schelling says: "if it has reality at all, [it] must not be simply a subordinate or subsidiary concept, but one of the system's ruling center-points."[283] Why does freedom do this? Why does it insist on becoming the "center point" of the system? Schelling does not answer this question immediately but turns instead to the difficulty that anyone interested in developing the correct concept of freedom must confront. He writes:

> According to an old but in no way forgotten legend, the concept of freedom is in fact said to be completely incompatible with system, and every philosophy making claim to unity and wholeness should end up with the denial of freedom.[284]

It should be noted here that by "system", Schelling is not speaking about his own philosophy of nature, but precisely what has *occasioned* it, namely, the alleged incompatibility between system and freedom that has hitherto defined the central struggle of philosophy from Descartes to Fichte. As one delves deeper into his investigation into the essence of human freedom, one will

[282] Ibid., 9 [SW 336-337].
[283] Ibid.
[284] Ibid.

also see why Schelling had to arrive at freedom through his philosophy of nature, for Schelling states: "The entire new European philosophy since its beginning…has the common defect that nature is not available for it and that it lacks a living ground."[285]

6.2. Pantheism and the Denial of Freedom

Nothing has been decided at this point regarding the viability of developing a system of freedom. Rather, the urgency of the task is what calls for a decision: Schelling does make clear the stake is much higher than he has initially led on, for he says that the very possibility of philosophy stands or falls with this question.[286] One thing is clear: if freedom and reason should encounter each other, as they must, neither could remain in itself: to embrace reason without freedom is slavish, to renounce reason for freedom is intellectually weak. With these preliminary yet decisive remarks, Schelling delves into the first section of the treatise, which involves an account of the doctrine of pantheism, he writes: "the only possible system of reason is pantheism, but pantheism is inevitably fatalism."[287]

Note that question is now shifting from "systems of reason in general deny freedom" to "pantheism, as the only possible system of reason, entails fatalism."[288] Two questions can be immediately raised: why is pantheism the *only* possible system of reason? Why is pantheism "inevitably" fatalistic? Starting with the second question, Schelling argues that pantheism is not necessarily fatalistic, the fact that many seem to think so is based on misunderstandings of what pantheism entails. Schelling enumerates three erroneous interpretations of pantheism: 1) pantheism is a complete identification of God with things or *vice versa*; 2) pantheism denies individuality; 3) pantheism denies freedom. I will focus on the third one.

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[285] Ibid., 26 [OA 427-430].

[286] "Therefore it seems that no matter how much may be brought to support this claim from a merely historical standpoint, namely, from previous systems…connection of the concept of freedom with the whole of a worldview will likely always remain the object of a necessary task without whose resolution the concept of freedom would teeter while philosophy would be fully without value. For this great task alone is the unconscious and invisible driving force of all striving for knowledge…" Ibid., 10 [OA 401-403].

[287] For a detailed reconstruction of the Pantheism Controversy, see *Jason Wirth, The Conspiracy of Life: Meditations on Schelling and His Time* (New York, SUNY Press, 2003), pp. 33-64.

[288] Ibid., 11 [SW 338-339].

Schelling begins by claiming that if the reason for one's identification of pantheism with fatalism lies in the assumption that "*only* pantheism denies freedom," then many systems that are different from pantheism will also fall under pantheism. This is so, Schelling argues, because a "genuine concept of freedom" was only made available through idealism; prior to this "discovery," people simply did not even know what genuine freedom was, which means their systems denied freedom unwittingly (like the ancients who were condemned to the city of Limbo because they did not know Christ). By this new criteria (namely, the idealist concept of freedom, which Schelling calls "formal freedom" in contrast to the "real and vital concept of freedom" that has yet to be announced) then, insofar as there are many systems that have denied freedom due to their ignorance of the idealist concept of freedom, pantheism is no longer *necessarily* fatalist, which means there is no intrinsic link between pantheism, or the general idea that things are in God, and the denial of freedom. Following from this, Schelling argues that Spinozism is fatalistic for a completely different reason independent of pantheism:

> The error of his [Spinoza's] system lies by no means in his placing things in God but in the fact they are things --- in the abstract concept of beings in the world, indeed of infinite substance itself, which for him is exactly also a thing. Hence his arguments against freedom are entirely deterministic, in no way pantheistic. He treats the will also as a thing and then proves very naturally that it would have to be determined in all its activity through another thing that is in turn determined by another and so on ad infinitum.[289]

For Schelling, the real reason behind Spinoza's fatalism lies not its pantheism ("placing things in God…") but in the manner in which it conceives both what is in God as well as God itself as mere "things." From this deterministic metaphysics, Schelling argues, Spinoza's "mechanistic view of nature follows naturally."[290] On this point, Schelling presents how his own philosophy relates to Spinozism:

> Does one doubt that the basic views of Spinozism must already be essentially changed by a dynamic notion of nature? […] Spinoza's basic concept, when infused by spirit (and, in one essential point, changed) by the principle of idealism, received a living basis in the higher forms of investigation of nature and the recognized unity of the dynamic with the

[289] Ibid., 20 [OA 417-420].
[290] Ibid.,20 [417-420].

> emotional and spiritual; out of this grew the philosophy of nature, which as pure physics was indeed able to stand for itself, yet at any time in regard to the whole of philosophy was only considered as a part, namely the real part that would be capable of rising up into the genuine system of reason only through completion by the ideal part in which freedom rules.[291]

In the passage, Schelling provides an account of the founding of his philosophy of nature, which involves the animation or the "infusion" of Spinozism by the principle of idealism (namely freedom), which concretely pertains to the introduction of a "dynamic notion of nature" to Spinoza's physics. Furthermore, Schelling points out that his philosophy of nature as a "pure physics" can "stand for itself." This independence refers to the autonomy of nature as developed in the *First Outline*. But this independence is relative not simply because the philosophy of nature is the real part of a complete system that also stands in need of an ideal part, but that the whole of philosophy of nature would have remained impossible if it didn't have freedom or the spirit as its guiding principle.

Having covered the advantage of idealism over Spinozism, Schelling proceeds to analyze competing systems of idealism, especially the difference between Fichte and his own. Schelling argues the following:

> For idealism which has been constructed into a system, it is by no means adequate to claim that 'activity, life and freedom only are the truly real' with which even Fichte's subjective idealism (which misunderstands itself) can coexist; rather, it is required that the reverse also be shown, that everything real (nature, the world of things) has activity, life and freedom as its ground or, in Fichte's expression, that not only is I-hood all, but also the reverse, that all is I-hood.[292]

Through this contrast with Fichte, Schelling presents the other task that his philosophy of nature has accomplished: if Spinozism amounts to a one-sided realism, then Fichteanism is a one-sided idealism because its grounding thesis, namely that "activity, life, and freedom only are the truly real" is entirely based on the identification of these terms with consciousness (as we have seen in *On the True Concept*). In other words, Fichteanism commits the opposite mistake of Spinozism:

[291] Ibid., 19 [SW 347-348].
[292] Ibid., 22 [OA 421-423].

whereas Spinozism treats everything as things, Fichteanism sees activity and life only in the I. It is only through the two are grasped in their intimacy is there a living system --- "all is I-hood" means, precisely, everything is subject-object (degree-being).[293]

Having exposed the partial character of both Spinozism and Fichteanism, Schelling concludes his preliminary analysis of pantheism by arguing that idealism hitherto has merely provided the formal concept of freedom while what must be proposed is the "real and vital concept," namely, freedom as the capacity for good and evil. He writes:

> This is the point of most profound difficulty in the entire doctrine of freedom, one which has been perceived in all times and which does not affect merely this or that system but, more or less, all. Yet, it affects most noticeably the concept of immanence; for either real evil is admitted and, hence, it is inevitable that evil be posited within infinite substance or the primal will itself, whereby the concept of a most perfect being is utterly destroyed, or the reality of evil must in some way be denied, whereby, however, at the same time the real concept of freedom vanishes.[294]

It is only at this juncture that the challenge of developing a system of freedom discloses its abyssal character, for Schelling makes clear that the supposed incompatibility between freedom and system really hinges on the question of evil: insofar as a system --- whether it is the one-sided realism of Spinoza or the one-sided idealism of Fichte --- entails the positing of a "most perfect being" by which all beings are measured, the compatibility or incompatibility between freedom and system ultimately depends on whether such a being or principle can include the possibility of evil as a constitutive feature without, at the same time, losing its status of perfection or self-consistence. In other words, if all things were in God, then so is evil; but if God were indeed responsible for evil, then the very idea of God, hitherto the ground of intelligibility and morality, would become utterly incomprehensible. In light of this severe implication, the intuitive response is often "let's eliminate evil from the system!" In claiming so, one would have fallen into Schelling's net, for he says that with the elimination of evil, freedom is also obliterated.

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[293] "Idealism is the soul of philosophy; realism is the body; only both together can constitute a living whole." Ibid.,26 [OA 427-430].
[294] Ibid.,23 [SW 352-353].

It should be emphasized that Schelling formulates his advances over Spinozism and Fichteanism almost exclusively in terms of his philosophy of nature. I have discussed their differentiation in Chapter II by stating that Spinozism is a system of the absolute but not a system of freedom whereas Fichteanism is a system of freedom but not a system of the absolute. As a way of joining what the thesis has covered thus far and what has yet to unfold, this difference can be reformulated as the following: one-sided realism is nature without God, or ground without emergence, while one-sided idealism is God without nature, or emergence without ground.

6.3. Schelling's System of the Living

The present section deals with the central idea of Schelling's system of freedom: the ground-existence differentiation. Schelling makes the following points before his presentation begins: 1) the differentiation arose from the philosophy of nature; 2) it marks the point at which natural philosophy turns away from Spinozism in bringing about "the most decisive differentiation of nature from God."[295] Both determinations come down to how his philosophy of nature addresses the question of what it means to be contained in God, the most rudimentary doctrine of pantheism.

> Since nothing is prior to, or outside of, God, he must have the ground of his existence in himself. All philosophies say this; but they speak of this ground as of a mere concept without making it into something real and actual. This ground of his existence, which God has in himself, is not God considered absolutely, that is, in so far as he exists; for it is only the ground of his existence. It [the ground] is nature --- in God, a being indeed inseparable, yet still distinct, from him. This relation can be explained analogically through that of gravity and light in nature.[296]

In his critique of erroneous interpretations of pantheism, Schelling argues that the traditional notion of immanence amounts to a "dead containment of things in God."[297] The logic behind this claim is following: if God is pure orderliness, lawfulness, and goodness, then beings that are contained in it must also be perfect and orderly. But what is orderly and lawful cannot change ---

[295] Ibid., 27 [SW 356-58].
[296] Ibid..
[297] Ibid., 28 [OA 431-433].

to posit a perfectly ordered world in accordance with God is to deny possibility of becoming from the start. This systematic elimination of becoming is precisely what makes traditional theories of immanence "dead."

In order to save the becoming to things, as a philosophy of nature certainly must, a certain independence from God must be posited without at the same time undermining the possibility of the system that God represents. In our analysis of the *First Outline*, this possibility of independence was first posited on a monadic level (as a degree of nature, or of the becoming life of life), leading through the inorganic and becoming visible in organic creatures that resists the "will of Nature." In continuity with the *First Outline*, Schelling presents a theory of containment or immanence in which things can be said to depend on God without abolishing their individuality or freedom of becoming. This new theory argues that dependence on the whole entails a degree of independence from the whole, to be a part of a system precisely means that one is not reducible to it. Schelling demonstrates the viability of this theory by appealing to organisms:

> An individual body part, like the eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom, which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable. Were that which is contained in another not itself alive, then there would be containment without some thing contained, that is, nothing would be contained.[298]

As stated, an eye, as a part of the body, depends on the whole body in order to be. But at the same time, the visual apparatus is also a system that enjoys a degree of independence from the rest (e.g., a blind man can still hear, taste, touch, and live).[299] Extending this rationale to the whole of beings, Schelling's idea of a living system suggests that the very notion of dependence entails independence, as that of immanence entails emergence. Any being, insofar as it is a part of a system, is never reducible to the chain of causes and effects that has produced it. Conversely, if a system is solely constructed from the basis of the efficient cause, then it is a

[298] Ibid.,18 [OA 414-416].

[299] In the *First Outline*, Schelling writes: "Insofar as each organ exercises its special function, it would receive a life of its own (vita propria) --- to the extent, however, that the exercise of this function is still possible within the bounds of the whole organism, it would only receive a borrowed life, and it must be so in accordance with the concept of organization." Schelling, *First Outline*, p.52.

dead system. “God is not a god of the dead but of the living. It is not comprehensible how the most prefect being could find pleasure even in the most perfect machine possible.”[300] Rather than a system that denies freedom, Schelling argues for a living system that precisely asserts it all the way down. This, I argue, is the ethical implication or rather the motivation of his philosophy of nature.

Here we see why the distinction between existence and ground is necessary: if everything is contained in God *simpliciter*, then they will all have to conform to “a blind, thoughtless necessity” that renders becoming, individuality, and freedom illusory. In contrast to this, Schelling’s living system wants to save becoming by having beings contained in that which is both not God and yet still in God (since nothing is outside God), or as Schelling puts it, they must become in that which is “inseparable, yet still distinct” from God, this “derived deity” is none other than nature, which is the ground of God.[301] In the ground, God is not yet “He Himself” but is precisely coming to himself. Schelling likens the ground and existence of God to gravity and light in nature, and, in “human terms,” yearning and understanding:

GROUND	EXISTENCE
Gravity	Light
Yearning	Understanding
Nature	God

As already stated, the terms are distinct but inseparable, which means our comprehension of the ground-existence distinction must unfold by grasping the intimacy (eros) between them. This relationality will become significant when we turn to the question of love toward the end of the chapter. For now, I will limit my analysis to Schelling preliminary presentation.

[300] Ibid.,18 [OA 414-416].
[301] Ibid.

Starting with yearning, Schelling says that it is not the "One itself" but "the yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself."[302] The appearance of "feeling" is significant because it recapitulates the fundamental movement of the *Freedom Essay* as the development of the concept of freedom through the feeling of freedom, although this development is not undertaken by us but by a God.[303] Secondly, Schelling emphasizes the "essence of yearning" is difficult for human reason to comprehend because it has been "long repressed." He writes:

> We are speaking of the essence of yearning, considered in and for itself, that likely must be brought into view, although it has long been repressed by the higher things that have arisen out of it, and although we can not grasp it by the senses but rather only with the mind and in thought. After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground.[304]

Why does the essence of yearning or the ground of all things present a difficulty? In the ground, all of nature's forces are entangled in one another so that no individuation is possible. In the *First Outline*, this state is described as "mutual derangement" in which all actants are held together in an "equivalence of actions" (Schelling would later relate this to the egoity of God).[305] Yet, Schelling argues, this state of confusion is not passive or static. Instead, it is a yearning for existence, a capacity to be:

> Thus we must imagine the original yearning as it directs itself to the understanding, though still not recognizing it, just as we in our yearning seek out unknown and nameless

[302] Ibid.,28 [OA 431-433]
[303] To be precise, the movement of genesis is reciprocal: the process is about we experience the coming into being of our cosmos through the self-activity of a God as much as God experiencing his own coming into being through us.
[304] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, p.29 [SW 359-360].
[305] Schelling, *First Outline*, p.26-p.27.

> good, and as it moves, divining itself, like a wave-bound, whirling sea, akin to Plato's matter…[306]

Out of this yearning for a "nameless good," it is said that "an inner, reflexive representation" is generated in God through which he "sees himself in an exact image of himself." Furthermore, Schelling identifies this representation as the "understanding" or the "word" (*logos*) of the yearning.[307] Through the coming together of yearning and understanding, Schelling says that "a freely creating and all-powerful will" is formed. Furthermore, this will begins to "build" in the "initial anarchy of nature as in its own element or instrument."[308] Although Schelling's use of "building" seems to suggest certain link with human production, it should be emphasized that the process that is being depicted is not technical but poetic, most akin to birth. This distinction becomes apparent in the passage that immediately follows:

> The first effect of the understanding in nature is the division of forces, since only thus can the understanding unfold the unity that is unconsciously but necessarily immanent in nature as in a seed, just as in man the light enters into the dark yearning to create something so that in the chaotic jumble of thoughts, all hang together, but each hindering the other from emerging, thoughts divide themselves from each other, and now the unity hidden in the ground and containing all raises itself up; or as in the plant the dark bond of gravity dissolves only in relation to the unfolding and expansion of forces, and as the unity hidden in divided material is developed.[309]

In this passage, Schelling repeats the exact analogy between cosmogenesis and poesis which he initially formulated in the *Platonic Notebooks*. The central idea being God does not *make* nature; the "representation" that appears to him is not the idea or blueprint of an object which God can then externalize. In this "representation," God both forms a logos of what he would be like if he were to become an object unto itself and is at the same time moved or affected by the image of himself in his self-becoming. What has dawned on God here is an inspiration, which intimates

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[306] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, p.30.
[307] The co-appearing between "image" and "understanding," recalls Plato's account of the affections of the soul in the *Philebus* in which a "internal scribe" is said to have worked together with a "painter" in composing our experience. See *Philebus*, 39a.
[308] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, p.30 [434-436].
[309] Ibid.

God's journey into finitude in a manner that is not unlike the monads. In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling calls this "self-creation" (*Selbstbildung*).

It should be noted that in the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling does not describe in detail the genesis of nature, because this process has already been dealt systematically in his philosophy of nature. What Schelling is eager to get to in the *Freedom Essay* is what a "comprehensive philosophy of nature" has made possible, namely the ideal part of his philosophy "in which freedom rules." At the same time however, insofar as the *Freedom Essay* presupposes a completed philosophy of nature, the very unfolding of the former does not set aside nature but is concerned with nature in the most intense way, which takes us to the relationship between nature, evil, and human freedom.

6.4. On Use and Misuse

When understanding and yearning come into contact, the spark of life has been ignited in the ground; the more understanding seeks to develop this life from out of the ground, the more the ground strives to retain it by closing itself up. In *On the World Soul*, this struggle was described as the struggle between "inert matter seeking equilibrium" and "living, equilibrium-hating nature."[310] The outcome of this incessant interplay is the ongoing process individuation from the inorganic to the organic. Schelling encapsulates the movement of individuation in one pithy formulation: "the transmutation or transfiguration of the initial darkness into the light." Both derived from a theological context, "transmutation" refers to processes such as water turning into wine while "transfiguration" pertains to the shining forth of the spiritual from out the material or natural. Translated into the context of natural philosophy, the transmutation-transfiguration of darkness into light pertains to the development of more complicated forms of organization out of simpler or more pervasive ones.

Insofar as the whole of nature is caught up in this process of transformation, each individual being is characterized by the conflict between self-will and universal will of nature. Schelling writes:

[310] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.

> The principle, to the extent that it comes from the ground and is dark, is the self-will of creatures which, however, to the extent that it has not yet been raised to (does not grasp) complete unity with the light (as principle of understanding), is pure craving or desire, that is, blind will. The understanding as universal will stands against this self-will of creatures, using the subordinating the latter to itself as a mere instrument.[311]

As stated, all creatures (*natura naturata*) are "instruments" of the universal will of nature. Even though organisms have a greater degree of independence than inorganic nature, they are nevertheless instrumentalized or conditioned by the becoming-life-of-life. As we now turn to human beings, we will see a shift in the power dynamic between the universal will and the will of the creatures. Schelling writes:

> Since selfhood is spirit, however, it is at the same time raised from the creaturely into what is above the creaturely; it is will that beholds itself in complete freedom, being no longer an instrument of the productive [*schaffenden*] universal will in nature, but rather above and outside of all nature.[312]

Human being is separated from nature because its "self-hood" is spiritual, which, insofar as it is higher than the "unity of the light and dark principle," is "free from both principles."[313] Schelling sums up the unique ontological condition of human being, its emergent character from the rest of nature, into one phrase: "the same unity that is inseverable in God must therefore be severable in man --- and this is the possibility of good and evil."[314] Note that Schelling does not say "severed" but "severable," which indicates that there is a fundamental ambiguity or undecidedness underlying the human condition. In other words, severability is a situation that we did not create but nevertheless must respond to. It is precisely in terms of this undecidedness that good and evil become "alive" for us:

> But that precisely this elevation of self-will is evil is clarified by the following. The will that steps out from its being beyond nature [*das Übernatürliche*], in order as general will to make itself at once particular and creaturely, strives to reverse the relation of the

[311] Ibid.,32[OA 437-439]
[312] Ibid.,33 [SW 363-65].
[313] Ibid.
[314] Ibid.

> principles, to elevate the ground over the cause, to use the spirit that it obtained only for the sake of centrum outside the centrum and against creatures; from this results collapse [*Zerrüttung*] within the will itself and outside it. The human will is to be regarded as a bond of living forces; now, as long as it remains in unity with the universal will, these same forces exist in divine measure and balance. But no sooner than self-will itself moves from the centrum as its place, so does the bond of forces as well; in its stead rules a mere particular will that can no longer bring the forces to unity among themselves as the original will could and, thus, must strive to put together or form its own peculiar life from the forces that have moved apart from one another, an indignant host of desires and appetites…[315]

Recall how towards the beginning of the essay, the entirety of nature is said to be independent from God as entailed by the system of the living. This means that to be a natural being already implies a degree of independence or power. This independence reaches the furthest point in the being of human beings who are not only independent from God by virtue of their being-in-nature, but also independent from nature due their being-in-God. I will now present the human condition through this distinction.

As stated above, creatures are instruments to the universal will; their individuality is a means to further nature's end, understood as infinite self-becoming. This means all creatures (other than human beings) are in nature insofar as they are "used" by nature as a means of expression for this infinitude. With organic nature however, a difference emerges: they are not only used by nature but are also "using" nature in turn. But this is a kind of use that is different from the "expressive" use nature has for organisms because organisms are driven by self-preservation.[316] Furthermore, human beings, insofar as they are "no longer an instrument of the productive universal will in nature," are neither using nature nor used by it in the same way as the rest of the organic world. Instead, their being has unlocked, out of the depth of nature, yet another kind of use, Schelling writes:

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[315] Ibid.,34.

[316] Schelling has made this explicit when he writes that there is a mutual assimilation between individual and universal organization, a dynamic that articulates the spatiality of the organism has an inside standing against an outside. See Chapter V.

> The general possibility of evil consists, as shown, in the fact that man, instead of making his selfhood into the basis, the instrument, can strive to elevate it into the ruling and total will and, conversely, to make the spirit within himself into a means.[317]

This different kind of use, unique to human beings, refers to the use of the spirit that they obtained "only for the sake of centrum outside the centrum."[318] The consistent conjunction between evil and use (or rather "misuse") suggests that the Schelling's discourse on evil and human freedom in part depends on the question of use.

It is interesting that even though Schelling states in the preface of the *Freedom Essay* that prior to this point, he had "nowhere expressed himself" regarding questions pertaining to evil, his criticism of Fichte in *Statement* contains many allusions to evil that would reappear in the *Freedom Essay*. One of these allusions is that Fichte has made "sin, or the principle of self-hood," into the "principle of philosophy."[319] In direct correlation with this claim, Schelling writes: "for what in the end, is the essence of his opinion of nature? It is that nature should be exploited, used and only exists in order to be exploited; his principle, according to which he views nature, is the economic-teleological principle."[320]

Recalling our characterization of Schelling's perspective of Fichteanism as a system of freedom without the absolute, this characterization must be revised to a certain extent since it has become clear at this point that no system based on the denial of nature can be a system of freedom at the same time. In other words, Fichteanism is "sinful" precisely because it *thinks* it can affirm freedom without at the same time affirming nature or the becoming-life-of-life. This, I argue, is the theoretical core of evil, which at the same time allows us to grasp what the "essence of human freedom" means, namely, the use of the spirit, whether in deed or in thought, is always implicated by a misuse stemming from the same source. This begs the question of whether there is, after all, an usage for human beings that is beyond the inseparability between use and misuse.

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[317] Ibid., 54 [OA 474-476]
[318] Schelling, *Freedom Essay*, p.34.
[319] Schelling, *Statement*, p.25.
[320] Ibid.,13.

6.5. The Life of God

Throughout the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling repeatedly emphasizes that God is not a system, but a life. In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling says explicitly that the life of God "bears the strictest analogy to that of the human being."[321] The present section sets for itself the task of understanding the life of God that Schelling speaks and the implication of the analogy that it bears to the life of human beings.

Recalling how, in the Introduction to the *First Outline*, Schelling begins his presentation of his speculative physics by contrasting with the empiricist perspective. I have argued that the empiricist perspective amounts to a vulgar conception of nature insofar as it treats nature merely as a collection of facts that are finished and complete. Schelling speculative physics, on the other hand, precisely aims to grasp nature in her "becoming." Turning now to Schelling's notion of God, a similar contrast appears:

> If we are to form an idea of the primordial Being, its mode of existence and life, we have the choice between two conceptions.
>
> Either we conceive of the primordial Being as something complete and immutably present, which is the ordinary concept of God [maintained] by the so-called rational religion and by abstract systems, generally speaking. The more we elaborate this concept of God, however, the less life God appears to have for us…[322]

In this passage, Schelling presents a concept of God that is just as vulgar as the empiricist conception of nature. The god of "rational religion" and "abstract systems" is a God determined by reflection, a dead God (like a dead object). In contrast to this, Schelling wants a living God that is "personal" and "actual." Schelling then says: "we must assume that His life bears the strictest analogy to that of the human being, and that alongside the eternal Being there prevails in him an eternal becoming."[323]

Why must God divide himself into two eternal beginnings? Why does it bear the "strictest analogy" with human life?

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[321] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 206 [7,342].
[322] Ibid.,206.
[323] Ibid.

In the *Freedom Essay*, Schelling says that if the principles were not severable but unified in human beings as they are in God, then they would be indistinguishable from God. Furthermore, this lack of distinction would disable revelation as the self-showing of God. Earlier in the text, it is stated that "God can only reveal himself to himself in what is like him, in free beings acting on their own, for whose Being there is no ground other than God but who are as God is."[324] Following from this condition, the bonding of the principles must be something that human beings choose or appropriate out of their freedom. Schelling writes:

> God as spirit is the purest love: there can never be a will to evil in love just as little as in the ideal principle. But God himself requires a ground so that he can exist; but only a ground that is not outside but inside him and has in itself a *nature* which, although belonging to him, is yet also different from him. The will to love and the will of the ground are two different wills, of which each exists for itself; but the will of love cannot withstand the will of the ground, nor abolish it because it would then have to oppose itself. For the ground must be active so that love may exist, and it must be active independently of love so that love may really exist.[325]

Here we see why independence must be posited into the whole of nature: the will of love needs the will of the ground in order to disclose itself as love; this affirmation cannot occur out of necessity or coercion since then love would be "at odds with itself" and "cease to be love." In order for love to be love, it must "let the ground be active." The activity of the ground provides the resistance that is necessary for the realization of love *as* love. The selfish love of the creatures is the indispensable medium for the revelation of God as love.

In his *Stuttgart Seminars,* Schelling raises a similar question regarding "why would God contain a principle that is not God Himself but, instead, is unconscious and lesser than He."[326] Schelling states that the answer lies the "fundamental law of opposition" since without opposition there is no life. "Everything, if it is to become manifest, requires something that it itself is not *sensu strico*."[327] Finally, he claims:

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[324] Ibid.,18.
[325] Ibid.,42.
[326] Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," p.208.
[327] Ibid.

> Whoever is unable to separate himself from his Being (i.e., whoever cannot become independent and free from it) but remains altogether entangled in, and one with, His Being is completely trapped by his Selfhood and unable to improve himself, be it morally or intellectually…Likewise, if God were to remain as immersed in his Being, there would be no life, no growth. Hence He separates Himself from His being precisely because its being is merely a tool for Him.[328]

In *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling critiques Descartes' ontological proof of God but arguing that the "concept of the necessarily existing being" (*Wesen*) is not identical with the "concept of God."[329] If God can only be a "necessarily existing being" and nothing else, then this would be a dead God. Instead, Schelling writes:

> God can only be thought as the necessarily existing being (*Wesen*), and this […] negates all free activity. But what is called God independently of philosophy […] He must be thought of as free --- in relation to his own being (*Seyn*) --- for otherwise He could not move Himself, not go out from Himself, i.e., from His own being (*Seyn*) in order to posit another being (*Seyn*).[330]

Insofar as the life of God permits an analogy with our own, human beings too must be capable of "separating oneself from one's being" and use it as a "tool." How can we carry out an analogous depotentiation, not only in thought, but in and through our being? Between the highest potency of the I and the potency 0, there are infinite degrees and infinite modes of being --- what is the living bond that connects them all together?

To end my present thesis, I return to two passages that I have found most perplexing in my engagement with Schelling, they are:

> We must therefore assume that apart from the constituents of the atmosphere, which we can show chemically, it is suffused by a particular medium through which all atmospheric changes can be felt by the living body. When the atmosphere is overloaded with electricity, almost all animals display a particular nervousness; during thunderstorms galvanic experiments are more successful and Hunter's light shine more brightly,

[328]Ibid. 209.
[329] Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 54.
[330] Ibid.,56.

> although there are no grounds for believing that electricity is the immediate cause of these phenomena. The sadness and even wailing of many animals, with the changing color of the sky, heralds the onset of major earthquakes, as if the same cause that makes mountains tremble and raises islands from the sea also swells the animal's breast. These are experiences we cannot explain without assuming a universal continuum of all natural causes and a common medium, through which alone all the forces of nature act on the sensitive being.[331]

Finally, in the *First Outline*:

> Although we confess that because we know sensibility only as source of all organic activity, and because all forces act through it as their common medium, it disappears for us into the ultimate conditions of Nature; from this it is understood that sensibility is probably the UNIVERSAL source of activity in Nature, and therefore is not a property of the individual organism but of the whole of Nature.[332]

[331] Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.
[332] Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, p.137.

Conclusion

In the foregoing analysis, this rhythmic motion of departure and return has been used to describe the formation of self-consciousness in cooperation with the external world (namely, in *Philosophical Letters* and *Ideas*). In *On the World Soul,* Schelling has equated it with the movement of "organization in general,"[333] and in the *First Outline,* the autonomous activity of nature herself. As we take leave of the *Freedom Essay*, this motion shows up in hindsight as the life of God. Was this Schelling's so-called "system" or is it an experience, a "life" that sought to express itself everywhere? The most salient feature of this motion is the experience of an outside that brings about transformation from within, an irreducible, almost inextricable intimacy that discloses the kinship of all things in the same gesture as it exposes the mendacity of all divisions. I have attempted to capture the force of this experience through the word "inspiration," but if one were to make it into a *terminus technicus*, it would be degree-being.

"Only one who has tasted freedom can feel the longing to make everything analogous to it, to spread it throughout the whole universe."[334]

Let there be freedom.

[333] "To me, organization in general is nothing other than an arrested stream of causes and effects. Only where nature has not inhibited this stream, does it fly forward (in a straight line); where it inhibits it, it turns back on itself (in a circular line). Therefore, the concept of organism does not rule out all succession of causes and effects; rather, this concept indicates only a succession that, enclosed within certain limits, flows back on itself." Schelling, *On the World Soul*, Grant Manuscript.

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