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This dissertation is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication:

*Approved by the Dissertation Committee:*

Adrian Johnston, Chairperson

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Paul Livingston

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Kelly Becker

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Benjamin Berger

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**OF A DIFFERENT MIND:  
THE EARLY SCHELLING AND PROBLEMS IN THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND**

by

**MARCEL LEBOW**

B.A., Philosophy, University of California, Riverside, 2013  
M.A., Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2018

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy  
Philosophy**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2023**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Michael Lebow, who earned his own PhD while raising me as a young child and whose late-night dissertation labors left a lasting impression on my developing mind.

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I would first like to express my deepest gratitude to the entire faculty and staff of the University of New Mexico's Department of Philosophy. During my time at UNM, which I can say counts as an era of my life, I not only developed as a thinker but as a person. This development can no doubt be attributed not just to the courses I took, but also to the overall educational environment the department cultivated. My philosophical interests and eccentricities were not only tolerated by the department, but openly fostered.

When I moved away from New Mexico and began to work on my research outside of the university environment, I began to feel a yearning to return to UNM. This was not only because of the seminars and talks that I could no longer attend, but also because of the learning environment to which I could no longer contribute. During the course of my research, I felt I had become a much better student of philosophy. And I felt at first some regret that I could not have been that student at UNM from the beginning. But, I came to realize that it was precisely because of the department that I could look back at myself as this former self at all.

Adrian Johnston, the chair of my committee, has been a continued source of support and inspiration in my philosophical development. I look fondly and appreciatively back at all the discussions we have had over the years. I cannot thank him enough for all of the time he has dedicated to mentoring me.

The pluralistic approach of this dissertation would never have come into being without the influence and training of Paul Livingston. Paul's wide philosophical breadth and willingness to engage with all approaches to philosophy has shaped my entire

outlook on my research. I am also incredibly grateful for all the thorough feedback on my writing that he has generously given me over the years.

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I am grateful for the libraries of the University of New Mexico and the University of California, Los Angeles, whose collections and physical spaces aided in my research. I would also like to thank all participating libraries of the interlibrary loan system, which has made accessible some particularly rare texts. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to the maintainers and contributors of the online repositories at Archive.org and Library Genesis. Both websites have vastly improved the speed, ease, and affordability with which scholarly research can be conducted. I extend my thanks as well to all the scholars who offer free and open copies of their research on the internet.

I would be remiss in not thanking the respective teams who develop and maintain DeepL, Google Translate, Reverso, and Wiktionary. All of these tools have tremendously streamlined and eased the burdens of my translations and non-English language research. I am incredibly fortunate to be alive in a time when scholars have so many excellent aids at our disposal.

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# **Of a Different Mind: The Early Schelling and Problems in the Philosophy of Mind**

by

**Marcel Lebow**

**B.A., Philosophy, University of California, Riverside, 2013**

**M.A., Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2018**

**PhD, Philosophy, University of New Mexico, 2023**

## **Abstract**

This dissertation concerns the intersection between the early thinking of the 19<sup>th</sup> century German idealist F.W.J. Schelling and some of the problems within the contemporary philosophy of mind. I aim to show that a study of Schelling's work illuminates research paths still left open to us today when confronting the problems surrounding the mind's place in the world. I provide an overview of the trajectory of Schelling's early thought. I argue that while Schelling's philosophy changes during the course of his career, each of his positions is concerned with establishing a foundationalist monism. I criticize versions of his view but extract some insights. I argue that Schelling's position interfaces with a wider set of current topics in the philosophy of mind literature, namely the mind-body problem, the issue of mental causation, the mystery of qualia, and the question of mind's relation to substance.



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## Introduction

The aim of this dissertation does not concern a study of Schelling *per se*. For one, there is not one Schelling. And, of the various Schellings that there are, this study only concerns his earlier but most active period, roughly the years between 1794 and 1810. Yet, as I aim to show in what is to come, there is indeed a common thread that runs through much of Schelling's works that reveals a shared set of philosophical commitments. Of these commitments, the ones I will focus on issue from Schelling's thinking on monism, foundationalism, and various topics that fall under the heading of the mind-body problem. These matters have not been selected arbitrarily because they are not for him positions disconnected from one another. Rather, they are of a piece with Schelling's greater pursuit for philosophical systematicity, one that centrally attempts to make a place—without reduction—for both the mind and body, subject and object, ideal and real, thinking and being under one framework.

However, what results from an analysis of the common thread of Schelling's thought are extracted impressions, perspectives, ideas, and concepts that are themselves often dormant or merely suggestive. As a result, the historical insight an investigation of Schelling's thinking yields us can only bring us so far. But I feel a modern restoration and application of his thought can bring us further. So, in what is to come, it is also my aim to bring out in my own voice some theoretical moments in Schelling that I find useful with respect to certain problems in his time. These problems will be relevant in that we still also happen to encounter them today, albeit with refined focus and conceptual innovations. The topics I will target revolve largely under the heading of the

contemporary philosophy of mind, though as we will see, they always end up stretching out to the broader concerns of ontology and epistemology.

This dissertation comprises of six chapters, which can be divided into two parts: historical and instrumental. In the first two chapters, I confine myself to an historical introduction and survey of Schelling's thought. For the reasons I have stated above, these chapters will be limited in scope and exposted with the aim of orienting the reader to the problems with which the last four chapters deal.

In both Chapters 1 and 2, I draw out the shared current of Schelling's early intellectual trajectory. Both focus on the themes of foundationalism, monism, and the mind-body problem. However, in Chapter 1, I first offer an interpretive framework that will allow us to trace with greater ease Schelling's evolving thinking on these themes.

In Chapter 2, I then go into greater detail about the origin and shifting positions of Schelling's foundationalism and monism. Along the way, Chapter 2 also extracts and defines four core features that Schelling will develop out of his foundationalist monism and make use of throughout his career. These features are: unconditionality, reflexivity, activity, and reciprocity. Each of these concepts are employed implicitly and explicitly by him when thinking about issues of the mind and the body.

In the last four chapters, I turn my attention to instrumentalizing Schelling's thought. Though these chapters also offer historical and interpretive examinations of Schelling, they are written with the aim of mobilizing Schelling topically in relation to problems concerning the mind's place in the world. Each chapter targets different problems: the apparent opposition between the mind and body, the question of the causal

efficacy of the mental, the mystery of phenomenal experience, and the search for the right substance ontology needed to adequately accommodate for mindedness and subjectivity.

In Chapter 3, I introduce what I call Schelling's concept of negativity. I argue that this concept allows us to further concretize Schelling's thinking on the mind-body problem, specifically in terms of the subject/object divide as he prefers to frame the issue. Along the way, I introduce Gottlob Frege's concept/object distinction, employing it as a means to draw out some of Schelling's analysis of the subject/object divide and the so-called intellectual illusions Schelling thinks that can result from this divide. This chapter hopes to show how and why for Schelling the mind and body appear separate but are, on his account, ultimately unified.

In Chapter 4, I turn to what is commonly called in today's philosophy of mind the issue of mental causation—that is, the issue of how the mind itself (as opposed to merely the body) can be causally efficacious. I explore in further detail Schelling's notions of unconditionality and activity. I argue that Schelling conceives of these notions as combined into one anhypothetical principle. I then introduce Stephen Yablo's determinable/determinate distinction as a means to capture some of Schelling's thinking on causation. The aim of this chapter is to offer a potential Schellingian way the mind may be considered causally efficacious.

In Chapter 5, I investigate some of the issues surrounding what is now variously labeled the problem of qualia, qualitative experience, sense, or phenomenal presentation. I study and critique Schelling's own early theory of quality and thinking on the nature of the empirical. I then apply a stripped-down version of his theory to two modern problems posed about qualia, namely Frank Jackson's knowledge argument and its close cousin,

the explanatory gap argument. I argue that Schelling rejects the premises of each respective argument. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate the manner Schelling thinks qualitative experience enjoys a special epistemological status while nonetheless not being epiphenomenal.

Finally, in Chapter 6, I survey various misleading proclamations Schelling makes about the nature of matter and related issues throughout his early career. I attempt to demystify much his thinking. I then introduce David Chalmers' taxonomy of substance ontologies and their relation to theories of consciousness. Examining Schelling in relation to this taxonomy, I argue that Schelling falls into a new class while nonetheless closely resembling what Chalmers titles a type-F monist, also known as a panpsychist or panprotopsychist. Here the thesis is that Schelling is what I call a type-G monist, which is class of monism and realism about matter that nevertheless reconceives of our notion of the physical.

In the end, I cannot say that what results is a total and cohesive picture of a rehabilitated Schelling. This dissertation instead offers a collection of Schelling-inspired responses to some problems of the mind and the body. These responses show a Schelling who takes seriously the divide between the mind and the body but also a Schelling who finds this divide ultimately illusory for ontological reasons. Moreover, this dissertation shows how Schelling is someone who believes in the causal efficacy of the mental, who defends the uniqueness of the phenomenal, and who rethinks our conception of the physical world.

Although many of Schelling's scientific and philosophical views are untenable from our present standpoint, a study of his work nevertheless illuminates research paths

still left open to us today in the philosophy of mind while enabling us at the same time to avoid some of the mistakes of the past. And while this dissertation looks back to but one thinker's views on the mind from days long gone, I think it still offers some ways forward, toward a new conception of mind. This mind is one largely familiar to us, only a little different. And that, at least, is what this dissertation is after.

## Chapter 1: Schelling Without Tears – A Brief Introduction to Schelling’s Early Intellectual Trajectory and Its Relation to the Mind-Body Problem<sup>1</sup>

When Schelling's name is mentioned, people like to point out that this thinker constantly changed his standpoint, and one often designates this as a lack in character. But the truth is that there was seldom a thinker who fought so passionately ever since his earliest periods for his one and unique standpoint.

—Martin Heidegger<sup>2</sup>

Schelling, from the periods of 1794 to about 1810, advances a form of foundationalist monism, though with countless revisions and variable emphasis.<sup>3</sup> This foundationalism is originally of a piece with broader efforts by thinkers such as Reinhold and Fichte within the immediate post-Kantian context to secure a philosophical system free from skeptical attacks thought to arise from some shortcomings, specifically dualisms, of Kant’s own system. In turn, Schelling’s foundationalism grows out of a monist revision of transcendental philosophy. And this transforms, in part, with Schelling’s increasing sensitivity to the issues a systematic monism presents in relation to the mind-body problem, or the subject/object divide as Schelling will prefer to frame the issue. What Schelling comes to alter are not so much the basic principles of his foundationalism but their ontological priority and reality. Central to these alterations is the attempt to offer a

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<sup>1</sup> All citations of Schelling reference first any available English translation utilized, and second, where possible, its place in his *Sämtliche Werke*. See F. W. J. Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling, 14 vols, (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–1861), hereafter cited as *SW* followed by volume and page number.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 6.

<sup>3</sup> There is a stronger claim to be made, which is that Schelling maintains this foundationalism for longer. However, for the purposes of this dissertation such a claim need not be made.



conception of subjectivity nonetheless responsive to the challenges that accompany a commitment to an all-encompassing monism and the insights of the natural sciences.

Although Schelling's thought adjusts and wavers during the course of his earlier career, I will argue in this chapter as well as in further detail in the next chapter that Schelling's commitment to foundationalism remains constant. And this constancy can be attributed in part to broader-scale commitments Schelling's has on the mind-body problem and his critiques of certain dualist and monist perspectives on the problem. In spite of all his changes in thinking, Schelling can be said to be a thinker of the immanence of the mind and body, subject and object, ideal and real, thinking and being, and other related terms.<sup>4</sup> And it is the adherence to this thesis that can be found in both subjectivist and non-subjectivist, epistemological and ontological strains of his thought.

However, as discussed in the Introduction of this dissertation, beyond mere historical interest, it is my view that an examination of Schelling's thinking is also relevant in that it contributes insights into some possible solutions to some of today's issues within the philosophy of mind, its conception of the mind-body problem and its relation to substance ontology. Nonetheless, a tension is admittedly present within the following exposition of Schelling *vis-à-vis* these broader philosophical issues: Schelling's notorious intellectual trajectory. Even the most charitable readers of Schelling are keen to admit of this thinker's protean, vague, and often mystical character. As for the uninitiated reader, it is difficult just how to make heads or tails of what Schelling's is up to at all.

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<sup>4</sup> Schelling typically conflates these distinctions. I touch on this issue at various points in the dissertation, but I will treat them as largely equivalent as he does. However, the subject/object distinction will take terminological priority as this seems to be Schelling's primary focus.

Thus, in order to orient the reader for the discussion to come, I will first track the ways in which his thinking evolves over time. In the first section, I provide a simple overview of the periods of Schelling's early philosophical career and note each respective period's major texts. In the second section, I introduce the first major axis by which I believe one can track Schelling's thinking. This axis concerns where Schelling claims the principles of his respective systems originate: subjectively or objectively. Along the way, I show how this question of the origins of Schelling's philosophical principles was in part motivated by what Schelling frames as the mutually opposed monist positions of Spinoza and Fichte, along with the dualisms of Descartes and Kant. Moreover, I explain their relation to some of Schelling's views on foundationalism and the mind-body problem. In the third section, I introduce the second major axis we can use to track Schelling. This axis is a matter of how Schelling treats of the ontological status of his philosophical principles: regulative or constitutively. I argue that Schelling's trajectory can be charted across various permutations of these two distinctions, but that he ultimately arrives at a position that dissolves the former distinction and reconceives of the latter.

### **I. Blurred Lines: Periodizing the Early Schelling**

To speak of Schelling's trajectory seems to work directly against the above stated task of demonstrating the general constancy of his foundationalist standpoint. Indeed, Schelling's thinking on aspects of his foundationalism waver, change, and even regress. However, his standpoint should be read as a matter of development in the sense that Schelling's changes of mind nonetheless preserve certain essential structural features which eventually grow into one broader, more consistently systematic ontological and epistemological perspective.

In order to locate the stability in Schelling's thought, I first turn to a brief discussion of the general periods of Schelling's earlier thought and some major texts for each period. This will orient the reader for the coming sections, where I provide a basic overview of the pattern of relevant modifications Schelling makes within these periods, as well as the chapters to come. Because the aim of this chapter is to move toward unpacking his foundationalism with an eye toward the mind-body problem, and because more comprehensive discussions of Schelling's intellectual trajectory have been undertaken, this exposition will remain cursory.

For the purposes of this dissertation, there are two primary periods of Schelling under consideration. Both of these periods nonetheless advance a monist and foundationalist thesis. First, there is Schelling's pre-1801 Fichte-inspired subjectivist transcendental idealist period. This period culminates in 1800's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. But different versions of Schelling's brand of transcendental idealism will be articulated in various forms in earlier works. Second, there is his post-1801 philosophy of identity period, which I will also refer to as his *Identitätssystem* and which moves away from subjectivism. This text begins resolutely with Schelling's 1801 essay "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," where Schelling distinguishes himself from his collaborator and mentor Fichte. However, while this text presents in a pseudo-geometrical style the claims of his *Identitätssystem*, there are arguably more comprehensive works from this period like 1804's Würzburg lectures (also titled *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*). And it is worth noting moving toward 1810, while Schelling will still reference and summarize key doctrines of his philosophy of identity, it can be said that he is already departing from this

philosophy in critical ways, though this is beyond my dissertation's scope. We see this in works like in 1809's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (also known as the *Freiheitsschrift*) and 1810's "Stuttgart Seminars."

However, this professed divide in Schelling's early systems is an oversimplification. Many of the reasons for this will be made clear in the course of this dissertation, but some guiding points should be made now.

As already stated, Schelling's philosophical position changes from text to text, sometimes even inconsistently within the very same text. Thus, even in his so-called transcendental idealist period, different theses, emphases, concepts, etc., will be maintained. I discuss this in further detail below. What is more, it is incorrect to think that Schelling drops transcendental idealism wholesale when he introduces his philosophy of identity in 1801. As I will argue in a few places later in this dissertation, Schelling will preserve conceptual aspects of transcendental idealism within his philosophy of identity period.

And lastly, naming these two philosophical systems overlooks Schelling's philosophy of nature or *Naturphilosophie*. However, it is incorrect to say that Schelling's philosophy of nature counts as a separate period of his thinking. This is because the philosophy of nature initially is premised in Schelling's subjectivist transcendental idealism. On top of this, there is not even one version of his *Naturphilosophie* even within any period.

In his philosophy of nature, rather than being a wholly separate system, Schelling is concerned with the philosophical basis of the natural sciences and the scientific insights of his time. He at first frames his philosophy of nature as subordinate to

transcendental philosophy, where nature is thought of *as if* it were independent of the subject. However, by 1800's *System*, Schelling views the philosophy of nature as a system separate from transcendental idealism for reasons I note later.

This changes in 1801. Here the philosophy of nature then becomes part of the philosophy of identity, where nature is afforded something of an independent status from the subject, though what this means is somewhat complicated. The major works of Schelling's philosophy of nature that I will concern myself with are 1799's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* as well as 1797's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, which was republished and revised in 1803 in light of Schelling's philosophy of identity. Nevertheless, there are other works of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* as well as traces, regurgitations, and so on, of it in his writing not mainly concerned with the philosophy of nature. But, again, these finer details are not the main concern of my project.

With that said, I am of the contention Schelling's basic position chiefly evolves across two axes that can be pinned down depending on the answers to two questions: (1) From where do Schelling's foundationalist principles originate? (2) In what manner do these principles exist ontologically?<sup>5</sup> The first axis finds its answer subjectively or objectively. The second axis finds its answer regulatively or constitutively.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The following distinctions that serve as responses to these questions are indebted to Beiser's lucid exposition of Schelling in his *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*. See Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Framing this distinction in terms of existence is not ideal. This is because even when Schelling believes his principles are real, he wants to distinguish their reality from the mere existence of objects.

## II. First Axis to Track Schelling: Subjective/Objective

In this section, I turn to the first question and axis. Along the way, I will discuss the historical influences on Schelling with respect to this question and show how Schelling's answers to this question are connected to the supposed divide between the mind and body.

Schelling will move between claiming that his principles originate subjectively or objectively. However, such a distinction should be qualified. Because Schelling emerges out of a Fichtean-Kantian transcendental idealist framework, saying that his principles are subjective in origin amounts to the claim that Schelling's system will at times be a matter of principles originating in a transcendental subject that furnishes the conditions of possible experience.<sup>7</sup> However, amongst other influences, Schelling's emerging interests in the natural sciences of the time as well as his debts to Spinoza and Schelling's colleague Hölderlin will lead him to eventually transplant his principles, stepping beyond and behind the transcendental subject and positioning his principles' origin ontologically in the objective realm of nature.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, although this classic distinction seems quite rigid and exclusive, Schelling's trajectory along this axis will not be so.

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<sup>7</sup> Disregarding for now the already present tension between the notions of ontology, transcendental subjectivity, and foundationalism, Schelling's earlier conception(s) of the transcendental subject never sits squarely with either Fichte's or Kant's conceptions. Part of this is intentional, as we see with Schelling's criticisms of the thing in itself. Part of this is not, and may have resulted from an (all too common) misunderstanding of Kant as well as Fichte. See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 473 – 475, and Slavoj Žižek, "Fichte's Laughter," in *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism*, Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, (London: Continuum, 2009), 137 – 139.

<sup>8</sup> Objectivity for Schelling can take on competing meanings. Sometimes objectivity for Schelling is just a matter of external nature or the world of objects. Other times, objectivity will take on an epistemological meaning, and which involves cognizing the world properly, and which also involves subjectivity. Here I set aside the differences, which I touch on in Chapter 3.

Here it might be good to take our first detour into the mind-body problem as it informs Schelling's development. It is difficult to speak of Schelling purely in terms of this. Rather, two interrelated philosophical issues march in step when considering his thoughts on the issue. First, there is the problem of the one and the many as it relates to philosophical principles and systematicity. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, from the outset of his career Schelling originally conceives of a foundationalism inaugurated by a single, unifying principle that not only allows for a so-called deduction of further principles but also accounts for the basic ontological make-up of everything else that exists. The mind-body problem as traditionally considered along the lines of substance ontology, though eventually taken up explicitly by Schelling, is but a species of this greater issue in that his monist commitments begin here.

Second, there is the problem of ontological priority as it relates to the subject/object divide. This relates to the question above of the point of origin of Schelling's foundationalism. For Schelling, the question of where to depart in a system of monism is centrally related to the struggle against what might be called reductionism, regardless of whether or not the answer lies in the subjective or objective realm. The balance that Schelling repeatedly attempts to strike is in offering a monism that does not privilege one side of the subject/object divide at the cost of the other where privileging here means claiming one's principles are subjective or objective in origin. The mind-body problem itself factors into the equation in that these two difficulties can only be considered surmounted if a system is offered which allows for an objective world nonetheless inhabited by efficacious subjects.

In his 1830s<sup>9</sup> lectures *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling will look back upon his earlier career—though with some fairly conspicuous attempts at self-revision—and speak of himself as historically situated at the end a crossroads that moved between two philosophical extremes of the mind-body problem. On one end of the extreme Schelling locates Spinoza, who Schelling here speaks of as the representative of an all-consuming, deterministic monism that privileges the side of the object at the cost of the subject. On the other end, Schelling points to Fichte, who stands on the side of the radically free but equally all-consuming absolute subject, and from whose enterprise Schelling will launch his own investigations. As intermediaries that lead up to these two extremes are the respective dualisms of Descartes and Kant, whom Schelling views as setting the stage for monist responses to each of their systems. Additionally, Schelling sees Descartes and his dualism as having initiated the historical preoccupation with the problematic of the mind and body as such.<sup>10</sup>

As it unfolds, Schelling’s narrative of the history of philosophy can be seen as in part informed by a dialectic whose common theme revolves around conflicting responses to the metaphysical concerns raised above.<sup>11</sup> Schelling’s place in this narrative will be

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<sup>9</sup> In the “Translator’s Preface” to the text, Andrew Bowie notes that the date of the lectures is either 1833-4 or 1836-7. See F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ix.

<sup>10</sup> Schelling writes: “Another consequence of the Cartesian system . . . was that the question of the so-called *commercio animi et corporis* [communication of the soul and the body] – which only plays a subordinate role in a philosophy based on higher principles – became for a long time almost the main question in philosophy that people concerned themselves with, if not exclusively, then primarily; indeed for a long time one system only differed from another by the way in which it answered this question.” Ibid., 60; *SW*, X, 29.

<sup>11</sup> In complete generality, Schelling envisions this historical dialectic, no doubt informed by Hegel, as proceeding by way of opposing and oscillating philosophical points of view, which, in the course of challenging prior views, a system immunizes itself against the points of criticism it finds in the former system: “what is undeveloped only achieves a higher stage of development through being contradicted, and is now revived with quite different and new powers, against which the earlier objections, which only touched what was undeveloped, can do nothing.” Ibid., 75; *SW*, X, 48.



that of a mediator attempting to collapse these problems into one solution that does not commit the errors of the extreme positions of Spinoza and Fichte or the dualisms of Descartes and Kant. This solution will amount to Schelling's attempt to preserve monism in the guise of a foundationalism, one that claims to mitigate the dichotomy of the subject and object from the outset by way of fundamental, indubitable principles.

Such a solution, he will claim, descends from Descartes, whom Schelling credits as having been the first to clearly articulate the rudiments of this position, though in a flawed manner. Descartes, Schelling writes, was "the first to introduce with a clear consciousness into philosophy the concept of a *principle* and of a certain genealogy of our concepts and convictions, in which nothing should be considered true which does not originate with and cannot be deduced from the principle."<sup>12</sup>

This concept of a singular, founding principle is none other than Descartes' establishment of (what Schelling labels) the empirical subjectivity of the "I am"—the subjectivity of our individual first-person perspective. However, Descartes' error, Schelling claims, is that Descartes place his principle in the arms of the so-called empirical subject rather than something more fundamental. Schelling writes that Descartes "contented himself with what was First to anyone, including *myself*," rather than what is first "*in itself*," or what is implicit to reality as a principle unconditioned by and abstracted from any and all particular determinations.<sup>13</sup>

Because Descartes' principle is conditioned by empirical or what we might call psychological subjectivity, Schelling argues that Descartes had given up any ability to

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 60; *SW*, X, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

draw anything but subjective connections, relying on God only later in his system to facilitate connections to the objective world, that is, the world of *res extensa*. Put differently, the issue Schelling identifies is that Descartes' conceptual apparatus fails to reach a level of ontological generality that can account for the apparent discrepancy or gap between subject and object. Descartes' system errs on the side of the subjective, on the side of *res cogitans*, thereby limiting itself unnecessarily to conceptual tools drawn from and therefore predicated on the empirical subjectivity of the famous *cogito*.

Thus, for Schelling, the philosophical foundation Descartes offers is not stable enough. At a minimum (going further depending on the period of his thinking) Schelling's position is that our concepts should not and do not begin with and bottom out in the personalized or psychological "I think" of any philosophical meditator. Rather, our conceptual access to the world extends to deeper ontological bedrock. This, Schelling thinks, is a formulation better offered by Spinoza's standpoint.

For Schelling, Spinoza's monism can be seen as an attempt to amend this shortcoming by radicalizing Descartes' notion of God as the necessarily existing being and making it instead into the principle of his system. God here properly becomes the conceptually connective tissue and bottom-level foundation of his philosophy. While Descartes' philosophy and all its connections are grounded in the "blind empirical certainty" of the "I am,"<sup>14</sup> only after arriving later at a broader ground of connection between subjectivity and objectivity *via* proof for the existence of God, Schelling reads

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 48; *SW*, X, 12.

Spinoza's key move as taking the notion of necessary existence, "what was First *in itself*," instead as the first and only founding point of departure.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, Spinoza's system steps behind the confines of the Cartesian empirical subject split off from the rest of the world over to a notion of a singular substance, considering nothing but what follows necessarily from this substance. The question, then, no longer becomes how the subject can, so to speak, bridge the gap to a world of objects. The root of all connections no longer begins with subjectivity with the explanatory gaps filled out by God. For Spinoza "God is admittedly no longer simply the occasional mediator between one and the other, who remains external to both, but their lasting and constant unity."<sup>16</sup>

However, such a move Schelling asserts comes at the cost of subjectivity itself. Spinoza, he writes, "cut off all reflections in Descartes which precede this concept [of God], and began at once with a definition of substance . . . Spinoza determined that which exists necessarily as substance, and indeed as absolute, general substance."<sup>17</sup> This general substance, though it unifies Descartes' opposition between the subject and object in that the question of bridging the divide between the two is eliminated, nonetheless preserves it in addition to the latter's view of a "mechanical and lifeless" objectivity.<sup>18</sup>

Schelling asserts that Spinoza's substance remains "only a formal and external" unity. Schelling argues this unity is really only a matter of objectivity, or the attribute of

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 64; *SW*, X, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 68; *SW*, X, 38.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 64; *SW*, X, 33.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 68; *SW*, X, 38.

infinite extension, which takes precedence over subjectivity, the attribute of thinking. The latter, Schelling claims, “only *relates* to what is extended and could not be at all without it,” and is posited only as “a correction of his system by experience.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Schelling here interprets Spinoza’s as a reductionist that fails to go all the way. The subject is epiphenomenal at the end of the day. All causal work reduces down to the attribute of extension, and where subjectivity is merely supplemental. As such, Schelling sees Spinoza as the representative of a philosophy whose foundations begin and end in an extreme, absolute objectivity and necessitarianism.

Qualifications, however, should be made to this later historical narrative of Schelling’s in that it fails to reveal his debts to Spinoza.<sup>20</sup> Without offering an exhaustive list of Spinozistic positions adopted by Schelling in his earlier career, four are relevant and worth bearing in mind as these themes arise in different forms in Schelling’s thought. First, Schelling both explicitly and implicitly adopts on Spinoza’s distinction between an active and creative force in nature, *natura naturans*, and nature’s passive products and mere appearance, *natura naturata*.<sup>21</sup> Second, Schelling shares Spinoza’s conviction that knowledge of the absolute is one which is infinite and totalizing, a form of knowledge which stands in contrast to finite and particular (sometimes labeled ‘relative’) forms of knowledge—something which Schelling is keen to reiterate in his most mystical and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 68 – 69; *SW*, X, 38 – 39.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Johann Gottfried Herder’s influential recasting of Spinoza in Schelling’s time also likely influences Schelling. See Johann Gottfried Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, trans., Frederick H. Burkhardt, (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1940), 123.

<sup>21</sup> See F.W.J Schelling, “System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular” (1804), in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays (1797-1810)*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 183-184; *SW*, VI, 199 – 200.

contradictory moments. Third, Schelling's repeated motif of striving, *Streben*, toward absolute knowledge and the tendency to aim to identify completely with the absolute is taken over from Spinoza's notion of *conatus* (as well as Kant's conception of the demands of reason and Fichte's own reflections on striving). Fourth, Spinoza's conceptions of freedom, necessity, and their alleged convergence from the perspective of the absolute is openly adopted by Schelling.<sup>22</sup>

Turning now to the other end of this extreme is Fichte and his absolute subject.<sup>23</sup> Just as Schelling reads Spinoza as passing through Descartes, so too does Fichte pass through Kant. The details of the path that lead up to Kant and then Fichte historically from Spinoza can be skipped for the purposes of this section, but it suffices to say that Schelling sees Kant's philosophy as responsible for finally returning to subjectivity, "a direction," he says, which philosophy "had completely lost since Spinoza."<sup>24</sup>

Fichte comes into the picture on Schelling's account by extending to its utmost limits this philosophical return to subjectivity as the foundation of a system. Transplanting the independence and autonomy of the subject found in Kant's moral philosophy, Schelling claims Fichte places the subject at the foundation of his theoretical philosophy.<sup>25</sup> And while the Kantian theoretical subject preserves a dependence on the external world of objects, not to mention the noumenal realm of things in themselves as

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<sup>22</sup> See F.W.J Schelling, "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism," in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 189; *SW*, I, 330 – 332.

<sup>23</sup> Here talk of Fichte should be somewhat qualified as Schelling does not specify exactly which version of Fichte's system he is concerning himself with, though he does make his treatment of Fichte one that then leads into Schelling's 1800 *System*.

<sup>24</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 106; *SW*, X, 89.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 108; *SW*, X, 92.

the purported point of origin of appearances, Schelling asserts that Fichte's philosophy shifts all dependence onto a notion of a self-positing absolute subject also known as the absolute I.<sup>26</sup> Schelling claims this eliminates any need for things in themselves. For Fichte, then, there is no outside so to speak.

However, Schelling criticizes Fichte on similar grounds as Spinoza, only now from the side of the subject. According to Schelling, though Fichte washes away the implicit dualism of Kant and his things in themselves, putting in its place a sort of monistic subjectivity of the absolute I, externality and the world of objects becomes lost. And like Spinoza's attribute of thought, Schelling claims objects instead for Fichte are merely appended to his system. This is because the reality of objects only stands in relation to the absolute Fichtean subject as a boundary formally denoted as the not- or non-I. "Nature for [Fichte] disappears in the abstract concept of the non-I," Schelling writes, "which designates merely a limit, in the concept of the completely empty object, of which nothing can be perceived except that it is opposed to the subject."<sup>27</sup>

It goes without saying what problems follow when any dependence on the necessity of the external world is wiped out from theoretical considerations and everything becomes dependent on one's subjectivity, absolute or not. In a particularly acidic remark, Schelling states of his predecessor and former teacher that "Fichte showed himself unconcerned about all this, he related to necessity as a whole more like someone who indignantly negated it than someone who explained it."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, Second Edition 1787), trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Bxxvi – Bxxvii.

<sup>27</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 107; *SW*, X, 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 108 – 109; *SW*, X, 93.

Such a claim, as harsh as it is, speaks a truth about Fichte's system. In his two 1797 Introductions to *The Science of Knowledge* Fichte will claim that the grounding of one's philosophical system—again the question of ontological priority—turns on an inaugural and essential choice, one between a system of necessity (what Fichte terms realism or dogmatism) or freedom and contingency (Fichte's own system).<sup>29</sup> Readers are thereby jettisoned into his system by means of this decision, somewhat overdetermined, and one that can be characterized by a double irony. On the one hand, to choose dogmatism according to Fichte amounts to nothing other than a Spinozistic necessitarianism, and therefore the *choice* for determinism. This amounts to a self-defeating denial and performative contradiction of one's own free subjectivity and intellect as well as, by Fichte estimation, the mark of a bad individual. Thus, the choice becomes a denial of choice and an affirmation of one's inconsistency since necessity as such never truly figures into the true picture of things. Or, on the other hand, one can choose Fichte's own brand of idealism, which supposedly stands for the choice of ethical life, freedom, and the affirmation of contingency. However, if the issue is framed from the start as a matter of a decision, the reader, entering into Fichte's system or not, cannot do otherwise but choose the side of the contingent.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J.G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 3 – 85.

<sup>30</sup> There is something more to be said here that amounts really to a triple irony in Fichte's system (of at least this era). Fichte originally stresses the regulative rather than constitutive status of his position, and in this way stays within the boundary of Kant's transcendental idealism. However, in doing so the so-called absolute subject must be understood as a regulative subject, and so with it freedom remains regulative. Consequently, to choose Fichte's side of the subject *qua* regulative ideal amounts to no real subject at all—a third irony.

Thus, if Spinoza can be read as a thinker whose system is marked by a reduction to the utmost necessity and objectivity, then Fichte's program is one grounded in extreme contingency and subjectivity, which eliminates all else.

In a lengthy remark from an earlier Erlangen manuscript appended to Schelling's 1830s lectures by Schelling's son, Schelling implies that this move functions as a response to Kant's transcendental subject, who, in a similar fashion discussed above with Descartes, denied "every possible breaking through into the objective."<sup>31</sup> After all, for Kant's system objects are conditioned by the subject, and not *vice versa*. But Kant does not fully commit to this position in his concession of the existence of things in themselves.<sup>32</sup> Going on (interestingly, Schelling negates the choice of alternatives for Fichte himself) Schelling writes,

There was no alternative here, if one did not wish to move once again into the absolute object which destroys everything free in the subject, than to move to the opposite – to the all-destroying subject, which was no longer the empirical subject of Descartes, but only the absolute subject, the transcendental *I*. . . . Fichte's idealism thus is the complete opposite of Spinozism or is an *inverted* Spinozism, because it opposes to Spinoza's absolute object, which destroys everything subjective, the subject in its absoluteness, opposes the *deed* to the merely immobile being (*Seyn*) of Spinoza.<sup>33</sup>

And so, with Fichte's subject we arrive at the other side of Schelling's historical dialectic of the mind-body problem and the question of philosophical foundations. From here, Schelling will describe his earlier career as one picking up from Fichte's errors, where his task begins with having to restore necessity and "to get back to objectivity" by modifying

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<sup>31</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 108; SW, X, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxviii.

<sup>33</sup> Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 108; SW, X, 91.



Fichteian notions.<sup>34</sup> However, such a path will be drawn out. Schelling will remain with the Fichteian subject for longer than he probably should have—"I was in so little hurry to put up my own system that I contented myself for the time being . . . with making the Fichteian system comprehensible."<sup>35</sup>

Returning now to the earlier question of where Schelling stands in relation to the origins of his philosophical principles, it is now clear where Schelling begins. All in all, though, Schelling's position will evolve across three points of view on this axis of subjectivity and objectivity.

First, at times and ultimately Schelling will reckon with the inclusive thesis that from the perspective of the absolute, the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity dissolves and so therefore does the false dilemma between the point of origin of his foundationalism. Schelling will claim that from the standpoint of the absolute, subject and object are identical. This will become the thesis of his philosophy of identity, which as mentioned above will signify Schelling's proper escape from Fichte's all-destroying subject. As Beiser cogently describes this broad development:

Schelling now recognizes that there is something abstract and artificial in the standpoint of idealism: it reverses the order of nature itself, treating the *ratio cognoscendi* as if it were the *ratio essendi*, or what is first in the order of knowledge (the subjective) as if it were the first in order of being. The net result of such a confusion is that it removes the self-consciousness from its place in nature, treating it as if it were eternal and given, when it is in fact the product of the development of the powers of nature. The self-consciousness of the transcendental ego is not something self-sufficient, but it is really nature coming to consciousness through him.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 110; *SW*, X, 95.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 489.

For the purposes of this investigation this is the position of Schelling's we will end with, but such a view in fact is already anticipated as early as 1795, though Schelling will go on to retract such a perspective before returning to it.<sup>37</sup>

Second, at a pivotal point in his development, Schelling, not quite arriving at the above thesis of the dissolution of the subject and object, will assert that the principles of his system can independently originate in both a transcendental subject as well as objective nature. As noted in the first section, this position is found in 1800's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. Such a position is difficult to summarize in that it traffics in the extraneous let alone the inconsistent.<sup>38</sup> Schelling, in an attempt to keep with his own developing philosophy of nature while avoiding an outright break with the transcendental idealism of Fichte, will strangely claim that a complete account of knowledge requires maintaining the subjective and objective as two parallel, independent, and possible points of departure.<sup>39</sup> One can choose either as an "explanatory principle," but this in turn gives priority to one's system's point of origin.<sup>40</sup> Choosing the subjective would be to begin with a Fichtean-inspired transcendental philosophy while choosing the objective would be to begin in Schelling's own *Naturphilosophie*.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 476.

<sup>38</sup> Assuming we keep with the commonly held intuition spoken of by some contemporary philosophers as the principle of explanatory exclusion, when it comes to matters of ontology and causal explanation the extraneous is a mark of the inconsistent. See Jaegwon Kim, "Mechanism, Purpose, and Explanatory Exclusion," in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 3, Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory (1989): 77 – 106.

Schelling in this 1800 text is no doubt in violation of this principle, though what makes the system interesting is in part the manner in which he tries sidestep it.

<sup>39</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 2 – 3, 5; *SW*, III, 331, 339.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 5; III, 339.

Such a position may very well be conceived of as an explanatory parallelism reminiscent of Spinoza's parallelism, only now each attribute (thought and extension, i.e. subject and object, mind and body, etc.) enjoys its own independent philosophical explanatory apparatus. And, just like Spinoza, Schelling asserts that these two perspectives are two sides of the same coin of the absolute, and therefore ultimately originate in the latter.<sup>41</sup> However, such a truth can only be realized by picking up from one point of origin, and retroactively analyzing this choice. As Hegel will later summarize this move in 1801, "Only by recognizing this boundary and being able to suspend itself and the boundary . . . does it [transcendental philosophy] raise itself to the science of the Absolute and to the absolute indifference point."<sup>42</sup>

Thus, with 1800's *System*, the choice of where to depart for Schelling does not really matter. Subjective or objective, this is just a means to an end that reveals a more fundamental, indifferent ontological point of origination. We begin with an exclusive disjunct only to arrive at a meta-perspective that somehow inclusively captures this exclusivity as an identity—yet we can never simply start with this inclusivity.<sup>43</sup> The intelligibility of this claim, no doubt, is problematic, and results in part from the remaining influence of Fichte's subjectivism on Schelling. It is telling that Schelling's 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism* is, after all, elaborated on the side of the subject and transcendental idealism. And while Schelling seems here to want to eat the cake of

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 4; III, 333.

<sup>42</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977), 172.

<sup>43</sup> In a lecture on Spinoza, Schelling will describe Spinoza's parallelism in similar terms: "Spinoza's true idea is, therefore, an absolute unity of substance combined with absolute opposition (mutual exclusion) of the attributes." See Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 68; SW, X, 38.

the absolute and have it too, he will go on to develop a more intelligible position that allows him in some sense to do this. This will amount to his above mentioned move beyond subjectivism into a full realization of his *Identitätssystem*, which will mark perhaps the strongest realization of his foundationalism.<sup>44</sup>

Third, at even other times, in Schelling's battle to break free from subjectivism. Here Schelling will appear to assert two different, exclusive points of origin, but mediate such a contradiction by claiming different existential statuses of his foundation, regulative or constitutive, which constitutes the other axis of Schelling's trajectory. I turn now to this axis.

### **III. Second Axis to Track Schelling: Regulative/Constitutive**

Turning now to the second axis and question posed above (In what manner do Schelling's foundational principles exist ontologically?), Schelling will adopt either a constitutive position or a regulative position in relation to his theoretical points of origin. In claiming that Schelling adopts a constitutive position, I mean to say that he claims his principles have a real and efficacious status—they exist as the structure of reality and as such. In contrast, Schelling's regulative moments treat of his principles merely in ideal or hypothetical terms. This means that his principles can only be assumed to be the case for practical and supplemental purposes. These principles, rather than concerning anything certain about the nature of things, are simply treated as if they were the case to resolve certain theoretical problems. This regulative position is an outgrowth of the belief that there are limits to what we can know that Kant introduces in his critical philosophy.

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<sup>44</sup> Strongest is perhaps not the right word. In 1809's *Freiheitsschrift*, with the introduction of the notion of non-ground or *ungrund* Schelling's foundation shifts to one of paradoxical foundationlessness. Perhaps this has its own strength.

To add to the complications discussed with the first axis, taken together the permutations of Schelling's positions along each axis—of origin (subjective/objective) and of existential status (constitutive/regulative)—are sometimes ambiguous. Starting with Schelling's earliest philosophical essay, 1794's "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," Schelling asserts the Fichtean thesis that Kantian transcendental idealism can be founded in a self-positing, subjectivist principle of the I. In this way, Schelling's foundationalism will originate in a form of subjectivism. However, as will be discussed in what follows, this position differs from that of Fichte's in that Schelling's investigation is ambiguous regarding the existential status of his principles, suggesting at once a realist, constitutive nature to his foundationalism as well as a more regulative nature to it. The earlier versions of Fichte's I are not in fact taken in a constitutive sense. By 1795's "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy," Schelling will extend his position, only now asserting the constitutive status of his principles.<sup>45</sup>

Two years later Schelling will begin his developing his *Naturphilosophie*, where his constitutive, subjectivist principles are grafted onto the diversity of nature itself. Here nature's laws and events are treated as a manifestation of the same fundamental principles found in subjectivity. But the principles of nature themselves are treated objectively but only in a regulative manner, which for Schelling means that their status reduces to something only assumed to be the case for practico-scientific purposes, but are

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<sup>45</sup> However, the matter is complicated in that Schelling will state that there is a sense in which his foundationalist principles act as both. This will foreshadow one of the insights of Schelling's later system. See F.W.J Schelling, "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy or On the Unconditional in Human Knowledge," in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 68; *SW*, I, 158 – 159.

ultimately dependent on the constitutive principles of the subject.<sup>46</sup> In other words, nature is only treated as independent for practical purposes, but really the absolute subject is spinning the wheels of objectivity. Hence, although two different points of origin appear to be the case, the contradiction between the two is only apparent in that the subjective standpoint has the final say—the absolute subject is real, nature is derivative but treated otherwise.

By 1800's *System*, in a similar manner in which both the subjective and objective allegedly count as legitimate points of origin, the distinction between the constitutive and regulative will begin to blur. Choosing a point of departure between subjective or objective will become regulative in that it allows us to start the process of philosophizing, to climb from one side of the ladder to the absolute. However, in doing so such a choice becomes also constitutive in that such a decision enabled us to arrive at the reality of the purported ultimate unity of the subject and object. Thus, we begin with a one-sided origin not because this adequately captures the whole of reality and so is constitutive, but because we need to in order to start our philosophical investigations at all.

I believe this blurring between the constitutive and regulative takes on a new form when Schelling's *Identitätssystem* comes into fruition in 1801. Here the distinction gets reconceived. Whereas in Schelling's *System* we start from one side of the exclusive

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<sup>46</sup> It's convenient that in 1797 Schelling speaks of his project in these terms. On the topic of approaching causality in nature from a 'weak' teleological perspective, where such a position already finds its realization in the self-organizing activity of subjectivity, Schelling writes: "It is therefore a necessary maxim of the reflective reason, to presuppose everywhere in Nature a connection by end and means. And although we do not transform this maxim into a constitutive law, we follow it so steadfastly and so naively that we openly assume that Nature will, as it were, voluntarily come to meet our endeavour to discover absolute purposiveness in her." F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature: As Introduction to the Study of That Science (1797, Second Edition 1803)*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41; *SW*, II, 54 - 55.

disjunct to arrive at a higher notion of inclusivity, in works like 1801's *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, 1802's *Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy*, as well as *Bruno*, (at least) up to 1810's "Stuttgart Seminars," adopting the constitutive standpoint of the absolute is not the whole picture. On the one hand, in this period Schelling is clear his founding principle of the identity between subject and object is cognizable and so real and thus constitutive.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, this identity is only initially partly realized at the level of our subjectivity and knowledge. Insight into the absolute must be instrumentalized, for instance, and applied to the sciences.<sup>48</sup> This is one of the central epistemic demands of his philosophy of identity. In this manner, there is also a regulative demand to see this identity in all forms of knowledge, though this language of the regulative is not explicit.

Schelling makes room for the intelligibility of this position by weakening his foundationalist premises. This should not be seen as a major change in his system, but more as a gestalt shift where Schelling comes to fully realize the consequences of his (and Fichte's) earlier subjectivist view, and his earlier changes of mind. Whereas the foundations of his system were formerly rooted in a constitutive reading of Fichte's all-encompassing subject, Schelling's lasting and unique standpoint will be that the subject's insight of the absolute I will be only one regional insight into the absolute. That is, the I will only be the absolute *qua* thinking subject coming to know itself.

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<sup>47</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," trans., Michael Vater, in *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, (2001), §7, 351; *SW*, IV, 117.

<sup>48</sup> See for instance: F.W.J. Schelling, "Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy," trans., Michael Vater, in *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. XXXII, No. 4, (2001), §II, 377; *SW*, IV, 362.

Schelling will take the features of the absolute I found in constitutive versions of his subjectivism and argue that its features persist within the non-subjective absolute as such. This absolute as such is largely objective nature but which nonetheless carries with it the structural seeds of thinking subjectivity. When knowing subjects emerge onto the scene out of nature, this knowledge and this subjectivity is viewed as immanent to but only part of the absolute itself. The insight into subjectivity as the I, sometimes framed as the I=I in Fichte's subjectivist formulations, Schelling will suggest, can be generalized and also grasped as an ontological insight into the absolute as such, as A=A. The subject and the object will in this way be seen as allegedly identical to one another from the standpoint of the absolute. But this standpoint needs to be realized in all forms of knowledge, not just at the level of an insight into our subjectivity. And this, in part, is a practical demand.

In a way, Schelling will take the movements and shifts of his earlier thinking and his very struggle to establish his foundationalism, once comprised of a subjective principle that is eventually placed into and throughout nature, as a deeper insight into that foundationalism. The absolute itself consists of such a struggle to come to know itself. There is a striving, tendency, yearning, or wanting, as Schelling will variously describe it, within the absolute itself to capture at last the totality of all knowledge and existence, which the absolute I, again, represents in an ideal, albeit subjective and limited form.

Setting this aside, while the general trajectory outlined here of Schelling does not yet adequately detail the workings of Schelling's thinking and its relation to the mind-body problem, this discussion will nonetheless inform the investigations to come. In what follows, I will flesh out Schelling's foundationalism and some of its relevant features. I



turn now to Schelling's beginnings and examine his foundationalism in its nascency and gradual transformation.

## Chapter 2: Ground and Non-ground – On Schelling’s Shifting Foundationalism and Its Core Features

The task of seeking the ground of something contingent means: to exhibit some other thing whose properties reveal why, of all the manifold determinations that the explicandum might have had, it actually has just those that it does. By virtue of its mere notion, the ground falls outside what it grounds; both ground and grounded are, as such, opposed and yet linked to each other, so that the former explains the latter.

Now philosophy must discover the ground of all experience; thus its object lies outside all experience.

—J.G. Fichte<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I continue to draw out Schelling’s foundationalist thinking. In the first section, I detail the Kantian origins of Schelling’s foundationalism. I argue that Schelling’s position develops out of a key alteration of Kant’s notion of an unconditioned principle that organizes our knowledge. For Kant, this notion could never be attained as something knowable, but for Schelling it is. I go on in this section to detail more of the motivations behind Schelling’s foundationalism. I discuss his framing of philosophy as the science of all sciences. In the second section, I extract and define three core properties of Schelling’s foundationalism. These properties are: reflexivity, reciprocity, and activity. In the third section, I then track some of the alterations and problems in Schelling’s foundationalism as his thinking progresses. Finally, in the fourth section, I briefly conclude by discussing how Schelling’s foundationalism arguably culminates in its own undoing with the arrival of 1809’s *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*. I note how the position found in this text, however, finds a link in Schelling’s earlier thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, 7 – 8.

## **I. Grundsatz: The Kantian Origins of Schelling's Early Foundationalism**

Broadly speaking, the foundationalist holds that there is a special set of beliefs which require no justification in that they are certain, self-evident, and the ground of justification for all other beliefs. In framing the definition in this way, however, emphasis is laid on the epistemological dimensions to a foundationalist project. Additionally, this particular epistemological approach happens to frame foundationalism as a matter of belief and justification.

In the course of his career, Schelling's brand of foundationalism should not be understood quite in these terms. To be sure, such a position will always come to down a question of first principles and the regress of justification, but because the epistemic elements of Schelling's labors emerge directly out of a Fichtean-Kantian framework, the language utilized—at least initially—will concern knowledge, science and its conditions rather than belief and its justification. Furthermore, Schelling will not merely be concerned with the epistemological elements of foundationalism. As touched on in the prior chapter, Schelling will develop his program to be at once ontological and epistemological.

In 1794's "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," Schelling explores a revision of the Kantian program from a foundationalist perspective. The position which unfolds here, though largely Fichtean in influence, carries with it a host of implications. Some of these implications here are only dormant, but Schelling will bring them with him throughout his career. Opening his paper by targeting a central point of incompleteness in Kant's critical enterprise, Schelling is transparent in his belief that critical philosophy requires a first principle:

The thoughts expressed in this essay have been renewed in my mind by the newest publications in the philosophical world. I had already pondered such thoughts for some time. I was led to them through the study of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which nothing seemed more obscure and harder to understand—from the very start—than the attempt to lay the foundation for a form of all philosophy without having anywhere established a principle that would not only furnish an original form as the root of all particular forms but also give the reason for its necessary connection with the particular forms that depended on it. The lack of such an original form became even more evident through the steady attacks by the enemies of Kant's philosophy, attacks often aimed at this very shortcoming.<sup>2</sup>

By this point in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, criticisms that transcendental philosophy failed to be entirely systematic was nothing new. Amongst the issues with Kant's program discussed during this era and with which Schelling will come to address in the course of his career, three are relevant for tracking the development of Schelling's foundationalist thinking.

First, it was said that Kant's theoretical system lacked a final, unifying cohesion between its parts. Skeptics of Kant as well as his proponents shared in this conviction. However, answers to the question of whether or not such an issue and its related problems were ultimately resolvable, and if so how, differed. As he frames the situation above, Schelling, here following the foundationalist convictions of Reinhold and Fichte in particular, asserts that the problem of unity with Kant's system could in part be resolved by revising the Kantian system by establishing a unifying first principle, one which would ground this system as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the translator, Fritz Marti, replaces Schelling's use of the third person with the first person. F.W.J. Schelling, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy" (1794), in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 38; *SW*, I, 87.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael N. Forster, "Schelling and skepticism," in *Interpreting Schelling*, ed. by Lara Ostaric, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 34 – 35.

Second, auxiliary motivations for the task of unification came by way of the broader effort to do away with Kant's broader dualistic mode of thinking—for instance, with his distinctions between phenomena and noumena, sensibility and understanding, receptivity and spontaneity, matter and form—which was criticized as lending his system to further fragmentation, trafficking in a host of other problems.<sup>4</sup> Amongst the issues Schelling will come to address were Kant's alleged inconsistent relationship with mechanical physics that ultimately undermines any notion of a self-determining subjectivity, as well as skeptical concerns regarding the thing in itself.<sup>5</sup> Schelling will seek to remedy such issues by packing into his foundationalism a notion of spontaneous activity and a collapse between form and content, and eventually with it subject and object and related issues like thinking and being. Part of the reason why Schelling's position remains with Fichte for so long is because he reads Fichte's system as a means to combat Kant's dualism.<sup>6</sup>

Third, amongst the charges mounted against the Kantian conceptual apparatus—the categories of the understanding—Kant was criticized for having failed to arrive at a justified and complete derivation, also referred to as a deduction, of it as outlined within the Doctrine of Elements in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>7</sup> This implied that even if transcendental idealism could be placed on a firm foundationalist principle, the rest of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Rolf-Peter Horstmann, "The early philosophy of Fichte and Schelling," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. Karl Ameriks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117 – 140.

<sup>5</sup> There is also the tension between Kant's teleological reflections and Newtonian commitments found within the second half his *Critique of Judgment*. Though Kantian teleology plays a major role in Schelling's career, Schelling's thinking on teleology is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>6</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 475 – 476.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

system could not follow without added amendments explaining how elements internal to the Kantian framework properly connected. As a result, the additional task of the derivation of Kant's concepts was subsumed under the foundationalist program. Upon establishing a grounding principle, the idea was that other parts of the system, the concepts being a key area of focus, could be deduced from this principle's implications, thereby unifying everything that followed.<sup>8</sup> Schelling, setting out in his 1794 essay to analyze what a grounding principle for transcendental idealism would involve, will go on—all in sketch form—to offer such a deduction that emerges directly out of this grounding principle.

The origin of such ideas was in part inspired by moments in Kant's own writings. Indeed, there are some indications from Kant, which Schelling will repeatedly point to, on the topic of deriving some elements of the critical system from others. However, to claim Kant himself was a foundationalist, at least in the manner Schelling will frame such a conception, would be incorrect.<sup>9</sup> In fact, throughout the *Transcendental Dialectic* and specifically in the section "On the pure use of reason,"<sup>10</sup> Kant considers and rejects the temptation of establishing the type of foundationalist thinking Schelling will come to adopt. However, it appears that it is from these very considerations that Schelling will orient his own foundationalist revisions thereby diverging from the letter of Kant.<sup>11</sup> Thus,

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<sup>8</sup> The topic of a derivation of Kant's concept will be a recurring theme in Schelling's work up to—at least explicitly—1802's *Bruno*.

<sup>9</sup> As to whether or not Kant himself was any sort of foundationalist remains a topic of debate. See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A305 – A309/B362 – B366.

<sup>11</sup> In his introduction to Schelling's 1794 essay, Fritz Marti claims that Schelling had before him the section titled "On the pure use of reason" of the *Critique*. See Fritz Marti, "Translator's Introduction to On the

in order to begin to understand Schelling's line of reasoning on the topic of foundationalism as well as some of his language, it is best to contrast them with some of Kant's remarks.

Having established the fundamental elements of his theoretical system which frames what is knowable, Kant sets out in the second division of his Transcendental Doctrine of Elements in his Transcendental Dialectic to frame what is unknowable in accordance with his framework.<sup>12</sup> At the outset of this section, Kant defines dialectic as “a logic of illusion,” where illusion is matter of the misapplication of the epistemological principles of his system (and of transcendental subjectivity) to alleged objects that are not knowable, rather than illusions within empirical experience.<sup>13</sup> Kant describes the general act of this misapplication as a feature of reason itself, claiming reason to be “the seat of transcendental illusion.”<sup>14</sup> The question for Kant then becomes why reason gives rise to such illusions. Despite reason being a central source of our epistemic errors and metaphysical pretensions, Kant claims that reason appears to have its own principles and

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Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy”, in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 35.

However, the line of thinking dealt with in that section as well as in Schelling's essay go into far greater detail in the course of the whole Transcendental Dialectic. For the purposes of this chapter, I will confine the discussion mostly to this small section, though the whole division of the Transcendental Dialectic offers further details.

Also, for a further in-depth discussion of Kant's relation to Schelling of this period see Eric Watkins, “The early Schelling on the unconditioned,” in *Interpreting Schelling*, ed. Lara Ostaric, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10 – 31.

<sup>12</sup> See Sebastian Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 17.

<sup>13</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A293 – A295/B349 – B353.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, A298/B355.

organizational comportment,<sup>15</sup> going so far in this section to define it as “the faculty of the unity of the rules of understanding under principles.”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Kant asks if it is possible to isolate reason for study in order to see whether or not this faculty, which appears to have principles, can actually be a “genuine source of concepts and judgments that arise solely from it.”<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the pure concepts of the understanding which only find their proper application in possible experience, Kant thus considers the possibility that reason as its own faculty has any of its own concepts and rules for epistemic use, distinct from the understanding.

The motivation behind this question is to consider the notion that reason, if it does have its own genuine concepts, could yield its own truthful judgments free from its application to possible experience, or if its behavior categorically misleads us. However, by this point in the *Critique* such a question should probably be considered rhetorical. It is of course a hallmark of Kant’s critical philosophy and his great concession to empiricism that truth statements as such only have their application with respect to objects of possible experience. As a result, the Kantian epistemic apparatus is only at the service of that which can find its application through the intuitions of space and time and with it the realm of the empirical. Since a notion of isolated reason being its own source of truthful judgments contradicts this requirement, the result for Kant must be that reason alone in fact cannot be a genuine source of concepts and judgments, though it seems to compulsively entertain illusory ideas.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., A302/A359, A305 – A309/B362 – B366.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., A302/A359.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., A305/B362.



Hence, although Kant sees reason alone as ultimately yielding no truth, Kant spends some time detailing the peculiar anatomy of reason's dialectical behaviors. The details of this study take on an elaborate form in Kant's work. But, confining ourselves to "On the pure use of reason," for the purposes of understanding Schelling's early foundationalist thinking, three appendages stand out.

First, Kant states that reason demands "the manifold of rules and the unity of principles . . . in order to bring the understanding into thoroughgoing connection with itself." Kant goes on to dismiss this as "merely a subjective law of economy for the provision of our understanding, so that through comparison of its concepts it may bring their universal use to the smallest number."<sup>18</sup> Thus, reason possesses a unifying inclination, one that seeks to synthesize all conclusions of the understanding under one broader unity, and which is brought under Occam's razor for the sake of rational economy rather than according to any fact of the matter.

Second, reason possesses a certain compulsive formal/logical, specifically syllogistic, character. Reason, Kant claims, "seeks the universal condition of its judgment (its conclusion)," and because

syllogism is nothing but a judgment mediated by the subsumption of its condition under a universal rule (the major premise) . . . this rule is once again exposed to this same attempt of reason, and the condition of its condition thereby has to be sought (by means of a prosyllogism) as far as we may.<sup>19</sup>

Each inference arrived at is subject once again to a further inference by the demand of reason. Here we find the principle of sufficient reason only in logical-behavioral form.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., A305 – A306/B362 – B363.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., A307/B364.

<sup>20</sup> Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, 142.

Third, and most importantly, this behavior's ultimate aim is completion: "the proper principle [*Grundsatz*] of reason" seeks "to find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed."<sup>21</sup> The desideratum of the sought after principle or *Grundsatz* is the termination of reason's inferences, where no further conditions need to be unpacked. This unconditioned principle ends the chain of justification for good. However, as stated above, since this ascent of reason does not result from anything found in relation to objects of possible experience. As a result, the way reason operates here cannot be considered by Kant as objectively valid. Therefore, it comprises of nothing but mistaken inferences that inevitably lead to epistemic illusions, which at best can be studied in order to avoid falling victim to them again. Therefore, for Kant, reason's unifying tendency that climbs the ladder of its inferences in search of an unconditioned *Grundsatz* is illusory.

It is with such language and these very notions in mind that Schelling will develop the rudiments of his foundationalist revision of Kant. Contrary to Kant, Schelling will model his revision off the notion that unity is in some sense attainable, one precisely attainable by means of a grounding, unconditioned *Grundsatz*. This conception of the unconditional is a critical concept for Schelling. Not only will it inform his early foundationalism, but also much of his thinking regarding the mind-body problem. As a result, I wish to pay special attention to it.

The order of reasoning for Schelling goes in reverse. Rather than remaining within the conditioned where the structure of our reasoning would only always operate within the confines of possible experience, for Schelling we can in fact proceed from the

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<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A307/B364.

unconditioned to the conditioned. Moreover, on Schelling's account, we can also derive the principles of our knowledge from this unconditioned principle, rather than extracting it from what experience cannot be without.

Returning to his 1794 essay, Schelling's thinking on the matter advances by way of a series of arguments concerning the nature of science as *Wissenschaft*, philosophy falling within this category. Schelling defines science broadly as that which "presents a specific content in a specific form," which is "an entirety governed by the form of unity."<sup>22</sup> Though this definition is minimal and broad, Schelling seems to suggest that a science proper is guided by some element of necessity (be it formal or material). He contrasts this with the suggestion that arbitrary pseudosciences are possible, though their fundamental unification is guided by "the hidden reason in the human mind, but not determined by it."<sup>23</sup>

Schelling goes on to assert that any science's unity fundamentally depends on its subordination to one condition (*Bedingung*), at least relative to that science.<sup>24</sup> His argument for this is quite simple, though perhaps *prima facie* incorrect when one has in mind axiomatic systems such as Euclidean geometry that obviously possess at bottom multiple axioms and therefore multiple conditions. Schelling's claim is that while certain sciences may in fact have multiple axioms or principles, this multiplicity presupposes a higher principle that conjoins the explicit principles such that it can operate implicitly as

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<sup>22</sup> Schelling, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," 40; *SW*, I, 90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Marti's translation of Schelling 1794 paper is inconsistent regarding the translation of '*Bedingung*.' In the passage I'm referring to, Marti switches between "premise" and "condition," where the latter does much more work especially when put in contrast with Kant's writing and Schelling's use of unconditioned, or *unbedingt*. See Schelling, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," 40 – 41; *SW*, I, 90 – 91.

the one system it is.<sup>25</sup> In rescuing Schelling from falsehood, however, the statement becomes somewhat trivial. No one would deny that although axiomatic systems are at base multifaceted, when one does, say, Euclidean geometry, the system mobilized is one singular system.

Nonetheless, three lines of reasoning bring weight to Schelling's assertion here. First, this statement marks a crucial point of contention in relation to Kant and the reality of scientific systems. If, as Kant asserts above, reason's organizational tendency toward unity is always at best a subjective "provision of our understanding," and at worse illusory in that such organization is ultimately not to be found anywhere in experience, then in some sense (though arguably not *within* the Kantian system proper) the unity of any particular system of science is merely a construction. The domain of our scientific thinking becomes something that we can stitch together only in a regulative fashion in order to help facilitate our endeavors. But this would mean no unity as such is real where a real unity implies successfully capturing in a unified scientific system the actual state of affairs the system claims to reproduce and represent (again, something Kant rejects the possibility of).

But if the unity of any particular science is constructed, philosophy included, there remains always an anti-realist bent to scientific practice. In contrast, this conception of the unity of knowledge for Schelling brings with it a realist commitment to our epistemic practices. We do not simply unite the elements of our scientific thinking together for pragmatic and organizational purposes. Rather, we do so because we like to think that ultimately this unity touches on something fundamental regarding the nature of

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<sup>25</sup> Schelling, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy," 41; *SW*, I, 91.

the world—at least insofar as we get things right. We stitch parts of things together because we assume the whole of the world itself is so and as such.

Second, Schelling's demand for real unities in reason brings with it broader consequences in relation to the nature of systematicity, completion and truth. If unity in any science can never be achieved, then at a higher level there can be no science of science which unifies all our forms of knowledge. From this it follows that there must be some truth which science ultimately fails to capture. This is consistent with the most infamous and inconsistent aspect of Kant's system: the distinction between the noumenal realm of things in themselves, to which we never have access, and that of the phenomenal, where science is confined but where unity as such can never be located. This leads us then to admit of the possibility that either our system is incomplete or incorrect. Obviously the latter option is untenable, but the former carries with it the ramification (amongst many others that will be set aside for now) that the system we have can never be claimed to capture everything, and therefore it can never be claimed to be *the* system at all.

Third, there is the question of the conceivability of that which stands outside of a final unity. Here Schelling's earlier foundationalist thinking, though largely a regurgitation of Fichte's reasoning, ultimately pivots on taking seriously the consequences of Kant's proclamations on the notion of the transcendental unity of apperception. This notion is Kant's own conception internal to his system of a unity, one which he also refers to amongst other things as the "unity of rule," "pure, original, unchanging consciousness," and "the synthetic unity of consciousness."<sup>26</sup> According to

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<sup>26</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A105 – A107.

Kant, it is the transcendental unity of apperception that allows us to combine the manifold of our representations and accompany all of it under one and the same “I think.”<sup>27</sup> Put differently, this acts as the connective tissue which allows that which is conceivable to be grasped in our self-consciousness as such, thereby enabling us to draw connections, cognize and experience the world, and make truth statements in the first place.<sup>28</sup> Such an insight will be brought to its extreme with Fichte and Schelling, and for a time act as the foundation of their respective systems.

Considering just for now the basics of this conception of unity, it stands to reason that if any and all inferences and epistemic connections must first be able to pass through this “I think” and the conceptual apparatus it brings with it, then the question arises as to the tenability of that which is outside of this unifying capacity. In what sense is a concept of a thing in itself, of a noumenal realm beyond our possible representations, true and epistemically conceivable? After all, truth and conceivability as such is, following Kant, tempered by that which only remains within our possibility to represent. To begin to even conceive of a point of distinction or divergence in anything brings with it the presupposition of a unity that conditions any form of differentiation and allows it to appear as such. Dualism of this kind as the epistemic split between the phenomenal and noumenal, on this account, seems therefore to be self-refuting as to even assert an absolute rupture is already to undermine it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., B131 – B136.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., B136 – B137.

<sup>29</sup> For a contemporary treatment of this issue in relation to Kant’s system, see Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79 – 112.

Furthermore, by the time of Schelling's more developed foundationalist thought, the consequence of epistemic conceivability becomes just as much one of ontological conceivability. The idea is that a foundationalist conception of unity, which for Schelling will move beyond the transcendental subjectivity of the "I think" to a substantial one that places unity beyond thinking subjectivity, carries with it monist implications at the ontological level.<sup>30</sup>

In order for a unified system of the absolute (a science of sciences) to be what it is for Schelling, it must not merely be a true account of all the connections that cohere at the ontological level. Rather, our theoretical apparatus, the concepts we bring with it, and the inferences we draw must be internal to the absolute in itself. Otherwise, our epistemic relationship to the world, and specifically the connection that links our thinking to being, would be left unaccounted for, external the absolute, and therefore incomplete. As a result, Schelling's demand for a complete, unconditional unity at the epistemic level will carry with it also a rejection of ontological dualism.

Now, whether or not these concerns are valid is a different question. Indeed, there are proponents of all the objections raised above. Regardless, such objections are ones that Schelling will keep with quite explicitly in the course of his career. In fact, sixteen years later in his 1810 "Stuttgart Seminars," Schelling, opening his discussion with a question reminiscent of the very problematic his 1794 essay is concerned with, asks the

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<sup>30</sup> Kantians would likely be uncomfortable with my description of this "I think" as subjective. It is true internal to Kant's system such a notion is objective, but what this means comes down to transcendental subjectivity, and so I mean it in this sense. See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B141.

following question: “To what extent is a system ever possible?”<sup>31</sup> He then goes on to state what he believes a system calls for, mirroring the above exposition:

I would answer that long before man decided to create a system, there already existed one, that of the cosmos [*System der Welt*]. Hence our proper task consists in discovering that system. The true system can never be *created* but only uncovered as one that is already *inherent* in itself . . . If the system that we wish to uncover shall be the system of the cosmos, (1) it must intrinsically rest on a principle that supports itself, a principle that consists in and through itself and that is reproduced in each part of the whole; (2) it must not exclude anything (e.g., nature), nor must it unilaterally subordinate or suppress anything; (3) furthermore it requires a method of development and progression to ensure that no essential link has been omitted.<sup>32</sup>

Here not only do we find sixteen years later an assertion of Schelling's foundationalist conviction of a first principle that stands in an organizing relationship to other subordinate forms of knowledge, but also a clear expression of his anti-constructivist, and monist orientation. Nonetheless, as noted in the prior chapter, what Schelling will assert as his “principle that supports itself” differs from the 1794 essay, but this will be discussed in due course.

Consequently, Schelling's demand for a maximally general unifying factor within scientific reasoning, though appearing somewhat trivial, speaks to a larger, developing realist (as well as skeptical) critique of Kantian epistemology, arguably an extension of the spirit of some of Kant's own attestations.<sup>33</sup> However, as was mentioned earlier, because this earliest era of Schelling's thought is greatly inspired by Fichte, it is ambiguous just how far Schelling here wants to take this demand for unity. Without

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<sup>31</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, “Stuttgart Seminars,” in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays*, trans., Thomas Pfau, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 197; *SW*, VII, 421.

<sup>32</sup> I have emended the minor typographical errors present in the original translation. *Ibid.*, 197 - 198; *SW*, VII, 421.

<sup>33</sup> See Watkins, “The early Schelling on the unconditioned,” 23.



going into too much detail, the unifying principle Schelling will unpack can be read in a (earlier) Fichtean vein as a practical (in the Kantian sense of the practical use of reason), anti-dualist revision and expansion of Kantian epistemology. This position maintains such a principle is but a regulative ideal. Or, this principle can be seen as something that is substantial, a constitutive principle true of reality, as will certainly become the case for Schelling.<sup>34</sup> The greater issue becomes that even if the former were the case, the efficacy of the position may hold only when reading from the perspective of the latter.

Regardless, leaving the ambiguity as it is, epistemic unity as such, that is, the unity of all possible forms of knowledge, is not merely an epistemically perilous compulsion as it seems to be with Kant. For Schelling, it will originate in a grounding principle and provide “the *general* form of *all* sciences,” though each science also possesses a more specific “*material* form” in accordance with the particular content of its study.<sup>35</sup> In rough form, therefore, Schelling argues for a layered theoretical model of the sciences and knowledge as such, where each particular scientific study participates in a broader, universal form of knowledge whose conditions may be captured allowing for a hierarchical connection to be drawn between forms of knowledge, part and whole.

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<sup>34</sup> Hans Heinz Holz reads the 1794 Schelling’s principle under the former, Fichte-oriented interpretation, only shortly after transitioning to the latter position. See Hans Heinz Holz, “Der Begriff der Natur in Schellings spekulativem System. Zum Einfluß von Leibniz auf Schelling,” in *Natur und geschichtlicher Prozeß: Studien zur Naturphilosophie F.W.J. Schellings*, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 204.

However, evidence of Schelling’s constitutive thinking appears shortly after in Schelling’s 1795 “Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy.” As stated before, here Schelling’s principle will be constitutive. Part of the issue lies in the ambiguity of Fichte’s own position, though in a much different way in that Fichte is quite explicit about the regulative status of his theoretical work while at other times suggestive of its constitutive status. See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 473.

<sup>35</sup> Schelling, “On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy” (1794), 40; *SW*, I, 90.

As I have already started to show, such a conception of a unifying principle will remain in Schelling's thinking throughout his career. And as I will show in the chapters to come, this principle will feature in how he views issues related to the mind-body problem. This principle will help position Schelling regarding his thoughts on the illusory character of subject/object divide (Chapter 3), the causation of the mental (Chapter 4), the explanatory irreducibility of our experience of qualities (Chapter 5), and the nature of matter and substance at large (Chapter 6).

Though taken at face value this suggestion is sweeping and perhaps too ambitious, the idea that all things share in the fundamental structural features of the absolute is not unfamiliar or unique to any monist worthy of the name. Whereas with a monist like Spinoza where (at least on Schelling's later account/caricature) ultimately all things are conceived of rigidly as mechanical and deterministic, Schelling will claim that all things possess an unconditioned character. Of course, the intelligibility of this will ride on just how Schelling thinks such a character and its relation to the above issues figure structurally in his system. However, the comprehensibility of such a position can only be unpacked in the chapters to come.

Coming back once again to his 1794 essay, Schelling takes the line of reasoning regarding the unifying nature of the sciences a step further. Modeling philosophy on the notion that it is not only a science but perhaps the "precondition for all sciences," Schelling argues that philosophy studies this general form of all the sciences.<sup>36</sup> Admittedly, Schelling's argument that philosophy is this very science comes off as just a definitional assertion. His claim appears to be that even if philosophy did not offer "the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 41; *SW*, I, 90.

ultimate conditions of all other sciences,” whatever the science is that does do this would have to offer in turn “the ultimate conditions of philosophy itself.” This would then raise “the question whether philosophy is possible at all,” thereby putting us “within the domain of that first science, which could be called the propaedeutic of philosophy (*Philosophia prima*) or, better still, theory (science) of all science, archscience [*Urwissenschaft*].”<sup>37</sup> In making such an assertion, the aim is to locate a hierarchy of the conditions of the sciences where the order of dependence is grounded in the most basic, fundamental conditions. The science that uncovers these conditions, then, becomes the science of the sciences.

Operating under the assumption there is such a science (which ends up being philosophy for Schelling) in conjunction with the premise that each and every science demands unity, Schelling draws the conclusion that this *Urwissenschaft* must uncover, amongst other conditions, the nature of this unifying form, what Schelling calls the “*absolutely* unconditioned axiom [*schlechthin unbedingten Grundsatz*].”<sup>38</sup> This is to say that each science and its conditions, though relatively unified (by its material form) in relation to the matter/content of its own study, stands in an isomorphic relationship to this greater organizational form, to which any science ultimately refers, and which lends the structure of unity to any instantiation of it whatsoever. Put differently, this *Grundsatz* acts as the condition of the possibility of any unity at all, and it is the science of sciences that studies this.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 41 – 42; *SW*, I, 91.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 41; *SW*, I, 91. I’ve added the emphasis to ‘*absolutely*’ to Marti’s translation, though Schelling himself emphasized ‘*schlechthin*.’

Schelling's claim, however, extends further than just a simple addition to the stock of transcendental idealism's conditions of possibility. Because the order of conditions for Schelling actually bottoms out at the unconditioned, contrary to Kantian thinking, this means that the sought after *Grundsatz* must end the regressive chain of justification, the chain of conditioning, and in some way establish a foundation to the sciences. In accordance with the standard foundationalist conception, whatever it is that establishes our foundationalism must at a minimum be first in the order of things and self-evident. Thus, the question becomes what it is about this *Grundsatz* that makes it the principle that it is.

So far in the discussion Schelling's *Grundsatz* possess two features: unity and universality. But this is something we can grant to many concepts as such. Outside of mere assertion nothing so far allows Schelling to justify this universal form of unity as doing enough work to meet the explanatory burden of being justified as in anyway foundationalist, truly unconditional, self-evident, and the like. After all, as it is with Kant, the argument can be made that higher and higher forms of unity can be posited. And there is nothing inherent yet discussed that allows this charge to be avoided. That is, there is nothing that provides us with certainty and evidence that things do not just keep going. In other words, the claim could be made that this form is simply conditioned *ad infinitum*. Furthermore, it is unclear why unity as such could be foundational other than it being a notion of maximal inclusivity that implies some minimal form of cohesion and connection.

## II. Three's a Party: Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and Activity

In order to bring his principle closer to sufficiency, Schelling will go on to discuss further properties of this unity that he believes allow him to claim that his principle is self-evident, foundational, and which ends the chain of justification, thereby properly earning the title of unconditioned. The three essential properties this principle will include are as follows: (1) reflexivity, (2) reciprocity, and (3) activity. It should be noted that these properties are either implied or underdeveloped in Schelling's 1794 paper. As a result, I will offer my own generalized definitions and provide a synopsis of how they arise for him. Nonetheless, while in 1794 these notions are dimly presented, they are relevant in that he never abandons them as ground-level features of his ongoing philosophical developments. As we will see in the chapters to come, each will be explicitly evoked throughout his career and in connection to the unconditioned. And they will be mobilized as features in his thinking on the issues surrounding the mind and body that I touched on above. I will gesture at how this is so in what follows.

First, I turn to Schelling's notion of reflexivity. I define reflexivity as the property that arises from something's relation to itself. With reference to the above 1794 discussion regarding the demands of a principle of philosophy *qua* the science of all sciences, Schelling claims that reflexivity must be present. Bearing in mind his minimal definition of science as that which presents a form and content governed by a unity, Schelling asserts that it follows from this that this condition of the unity of the sciences must itself be part of the very content of philosophy's investigation. Thus, when thinking about the principle of the science of all sciences, this principle must naturally include itself otherwise it cannot be a principle of the science of all sciences. Following Kant's

logical/formal exposition of the principle of sufficient reason, philosophy as the science of sciences must itself be subject to the question of what conditions it in turn. It follows by definition, then, that unity, being one of these conditions of science, must be one of these contents. In this way, philosophy's own unity necessarily falls within the set of its study.

Consequently, the meta-status of the investigation into the science of sciences leads us to stumble upon a property endemic to a notion of maximal scientific unity, namely reflexivity. An investigation into the ultimate unity of the sciences must eventually turn in on itself whereby its own unity presents itself. This gives the investigation of philosophy and specifically the investigated condition of its own unity a privileged reflexive status. On the assumption that philosophy is the *Urwissenschaft*, this condition of unity which unifies philosophy as well as the other sciences cannot be deferred whereby an even higher unity is discovered, regressing to infinity. Thus, Schelling claims the very unifying form of philosophy is at once also its content.

While Schelling's usage of the form/content distinction to argue for the relevance reflexivity features prominently here, in later works reflexivity is not often evoked in this way. For instance, as I will show in Chapter 3, reflexivity will be more straightforwardly connected to the subject's reflections on itself. Though this Schelling will be essentially thinking of the same issue—that of the absolute I—the approach there will be far more concerned with subject and object rather than form and content.

I turn now to Schelling's notion of reciprocity, or what he sometimes describes as the mutual determination of form and content. I define reciprocity as a property of a relation between two or more parts where each part mutually depends on or is

conditioned by the other part(s). Returning to his 1794 essay, reciprocity, Schelling believes, arises when considering a principle of the science of all the sciences. While the contents and forms of other sciences in general can be conditioned by other, for instance, empirical factors, on Schelling's account neither the form nor the content of the science of science can be conditioned by something beyond itself. After all, if it were, then it would not be the science of science in that there would be some other condition that transcends its grasp, thereby failing to be included in its unifying principle that premises the whole investigation. In other words, such a science would not be the absolute science.

Furthermore, Schelling argues, this science must in fact have both its form and content unconditioned. This is because in assuming that either form or content were conditioned, with the other being unconditioned, the unity of the two would end up itself being conditioned not unconditioned, "owing to [its] fusion," Schelling writes, "with something conditional."<sup>39</sup> Thus, the demand is that this science be conditioned by nothing else and it can only achieve this by only being conditioned by itself and hence be unconditioned. That is, the form of this final unifying condition requires itself as part of its content, and the content of this final unifying condition requires itself as part of its form. Without the former, it would not be the ground level unifying form that it is since it contentfully leaves itself out and therefore fails to achieve complete unity. Likewise, without the latter, it wouldn't be the final content of unity, since it would formally leave itself out, and again rule out completion.

This leads Schelling, perhaps problematically, to conclude that both form and content "can be determined only mutually, by one another. They induce one another.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 42; *SW*, I, 92.

They are possible only because each requires the other.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, Schelling will claim in this reciprocal relation (or, less charitably, in this circularity) we reach the end of the chain of conditional dependence and with it justification. “Here,” Schelling surprisingly writes, “we find ourselves in a magic circle.”<sup>41</sup> He goes on to say:

This circle in which we unavoidably find ourselves is precisely the condition of the absolute evidence of the ultimate axiom [obersten Satzes]. That the circle is unavoidable is made clear by the already proved supposition that the ultimate axiom must necessarily receive its content through its form and its form through its content. Of necessity, either there can be no ultimate axiom, or it can exist only be reciprocal determination of content by form and form by content.<sup>42</sup>

The resulting circularity of this reflexive and reciprocal unity becomes its own evidence. And this is what lends meaning to the foundationalist demand of a self-evident principle—the principle justifies itself by being the principle that it is. Moreover, we might read this claim of self-evidence quite literally in that the reflexivity of form and content presents itself as its self, where what is evident is precisely this so-called self-presentation, where the unity in question is, in part, its very own.

Consequently for Schelling, the fundamental conditions of science bottom out where the form/content distinction reciprocally determine one another, where scientific investigation turns in on itself, and where the content of investigation becomes its form, and its form its content. And though it deserves further investigation, it should be noted in passing that Schelling in later work will suggest that this also marks the ideal collapse of any and all divides between a conceptual apparatus brought to bear on any scientific investigation and its content. This is consistent with Schelling’s rejection of Kant’s

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 42; *SW*, I, 93.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 43; *SW*, I, 94.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 45; *SW*, I, 97.



dualisms and Schelling's commitments to the immanence of the subject and object and related distinctions. Subjects do not, on Schelling's later account, bring to bear a conceptual apparatus separate from the world of objects. For the subject and object, at least in his philosophy of identity period, originate in one absolute. And even prior to this period, Schelling's transcendental idealism itself already rejects Kant's thing in itself and the notion that objects we intuit are wholly distinct from us. This I touch on in Chapter 5 as well as Chapter 6.

Nonetheless, the conclusion Schelling draws in 1794 remains unsatisfactory. This line of thinking attempts to speculatively derive maximally broad formal and logically dubious insights from reflections on the alleged consequences of a notion of a maximally broad 'scientific' principle. Schelling then wishes to transplant this principle it onto the empty claim that not only all knowledge but ontology as such, despite the diversity of the world, terminates in such a unifying principle. And although this is only implied in Schelling's 1794 investigation, he will be criticized for similar maneuvers later in his career when they become a matter of course for his work rather than a matter of implication.

Finally, there is the notion of activity as the third property of Schelling's unifying principle. I define activity as the property of anything in a state of happening or becoming. This is perhaps the most difficult property to define. In 1794's text, the reasoning goes that because this founding and unifying *Grundsatz* includes itself within its own boundaries, where the inclusivity of this content (itself) makes it the principle that it is, namely the form of all unity, and *vice versa*, this cannot be conceived of as something which occurs once and for all. Rather, this is a reciprocal and reflexive

*process*. To describe this, Schelling will sometimes draw on Fichte's use of the term positing, or in the original German *Setzen*.

To stress the active nature of this ultimate unity Schelling leans on the grammatical difference between the tenses of that which posits in contrast to that which is posited. Here stress is laid on the present tense of the word implying that the past tense would bring with it the implication of conditionality whereby that which is simply posited is so passively from without.<sup>43</sup> Here Spinoza's earlier mentioned distinction between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* might be usefully recalled. Schelling's metaphysics lays priority on the latter notion of an active producing force of the absolute rather than its passive products. His conception of the absolute, then, appears to play the role of the *causa sui*. There is no question of what came first, the chicken or egg of the absolute. Both form and content are equiprimordial and come about actively from one another, at least this is the claim. Aside from the metaphysical and logical implied by this, the other downside to such an assertion is that it is unclear in what way such an activity is discursively articulable in the first place especially given the temporal conditions our linguistic articulations are subject to. Schelling at multiple points in his career and in his more mystical moments will latch onto this consideration, going so far as to claim the near ineffability and non-temporal nature of the absolute. I do think, however, that there is a way to argue for Schelling's notion of activity in a less circuitous or mystical way. I turn to this in Chapter 4, where I link his notion of activity to his thoughts on causation.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 45; *SW*, I, 97 – 98.

Now, up until this point in my exposition the proper name of Schelling's foundationalist principle here in 1794 has been largely avoided and insinuated. This is partly because of the admittedly unfavorable and misleading impression it would likely leave the reader with. It is also partly because Schelling arrives at it himself with little to no explanation. The name of this principle is none other than the famed I, or as it is variously referred to formally as the *I is I*, the  $I=I$ , and I am. By now in the discussion, it should be clear that this I, though finding its root in Descartes, should not be conceived psychologically, personally and/or empirically, but at a minimum more along the lines of Kant's transcendental unity of apperception and, of course, Fichte's own formulation of the I. However, as already noted, this principle will go further in that Schelling will quickly move to an explicit conception of the I that is absolute and substantial rather than a formal, transcendental condition. In this more developed position, the notion of the I as something substantially absolute seems strange, and the question may arise as what to make of it.

Commentators both on behalf of Fichte and on behalf of Schelling have noted the curious position one is found in when considering the reasons for naming this grounding principle of the I in relation their respective assertions on its nature.<sup>44</sup> Less acquainted readers may even dismiss the notion merely as the thesis of the worst sort of subjective idealism whose best caricature is merely its own proclamations. However, the short answer of what to make of this principle is to mind the premises that led to this point. The designation of the I can be read as capturing the minimal sense of a notion of a self, a

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<sup>44</sup> For Fichte, see John Lach's Preface in Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, xv. For Schelling, see Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 475.

proto-self if you will, one considered simply as an independent, reflexive, active, bare-bones conception of unity. This might be further illustrated by having recourse to Schelling's next step in his 1794 essay where he asserts that the general form of this positing I is none other than the principle of identity, formally expressed as  $A=A$ .<sup>45</sup> This logical principle according to Schelling appears after his  $I=I$  as an extracted insight. What makes the contrast illustrative, though, is the sense in which the arbitrary variable of A fails to capture the activity, reflexivity, and independent selfhood we tend to associate with the I, albeit at the cost of much unnecessary and misleading associative baggage. The rest of Schelling's 1794 essay will be set aside, but what Schelling will go on to do in that paper is attempt to deduce, though in a very incomplete fashion, other primitive implications from his principle, as well as Kant's categories of the understanding. Nevertheless, as noted in the last chapter, with Schelling's move into his *Identitätssystem*, it is precisely the  $A=A$  that becomes the basis of his foundationalism.

### **III. Shifting Foundations: Schelling's Foundationalism and Its Discontents**

For the rest of this chapter, I now turn to further tracking Schelling's foundationalism as time goes on. It is my aim to also show in further detail in what manner Schelling's position remains and in what manner it changes.

In 1795's "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy," as the title suggests, Schelling will once again assert the I as furnishing the unconditioned principle of his foundationalism. However, instead of speaking of the situation in terms of form and content, Schelling writes instead in a Parmenidean fashion of the coincidence of the thinking and being of his principle:

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<sup>45</sup> Schelling, "On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy" (1794), 45; *SW*, I, 97.

This ultimate in human knowledge must therefore not search for its own real ground in something other. Not only is it itself independent of anything superior but, since our knowledge rises from any consequence to the reason thereof and in reverse descends from that reason to the consequence, that which is the ultimate and for us the principle of all knowledge cannot be *known* in turn through another principle. That is, the principle of its being and the principle of its being known must coincide, must be one, since it can be thought only because it itself is . . . Therefore it must be thought simply because it is, and it must be because it itself is being thought . . . Its assertion must be contained in its thought; it must create itself through its being thought. . . . In short, *the principle of being and thinking is one and the same*.<sup>46</sup>

Schelling will go on and contend in typical foundationalist fashion that knowledge as such must come down to an ultimate principle on pain of an infinite regress and a lack of stability in knowledge as such.<sup>47</sup>

However, one possible point of ambiguity concerning the nature of a regress in relation to his foundationalist thinking should be clarified. On the one hand, a foundationalist may hold that while knowledge does not regress infinitely, we can nonetheless progress and move away from our basic ground-level principles to non-basic principles, where our basic principles do not clearly appear. Additionally, we may regress, climbing back down the ladder of our inferences and tracing them back again to our ground-level principles. This is what grants our knowledge its certitude. For Schelling this is no doubt what he wants.<sup>48</sup> However, on the other hand, there is also a sense for him whereby we never truly leave behind his principle with non-basic forms of knowledge. Rather, Schelling wants to say his principle always co-exists in any possible knowledge claim. This is to say the unconditional unity of the I accompanies and

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<sup>46</sup> Schelling, "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy," 72; *SW*, I, 163.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 72; *SW*, I, 164.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 76; *SW*, I, 169.

circumscribes all possible knowledge as a connective tissue, having a “continuous effect.”<sup>49</sup> This, though, is a much stronger claim.

Such a position might suggest that Schelling’s thinking is not actually foundationalist. Paul Franks, for instance, reasons that Schelling is the representative of a form of coherentism in that his system is built upon a circularity.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the fact that non-basic forms of knowledge never leave Schelling’s principle behind might support this coherentist label. Franks’ definition of foundationalism requires that one’s ground terminate in something noncircular while also rejecting the possibility of an infinite regress. Furthermore, Franks claims that the coherentist believes genuine grounds may be ungrounded or infinitely regressive or circular. I do not disagree with Franks’ belief that Schelling’s position differs from a standard foundationalism, but I still believe it can be labeled a form of foundationalism. Though Schelling openly admits of the circularity of his ground and will also later say in 1809 the ground of the absolute itself is ungrounded, Schelling still openly rejects any infinite regress. For, as I have shown, he clearly believes everything must terminate in a ground. It is just that the circularity that Schelling’s foundation terminates in is a privileged circularity, or so at least he claims. As a result, the difference between Franks’ classification and mine is, I believe, semantic.

Returning to Schelling’s stronger position, if we take the I in the Kantian sense discussed earlier, Schelling’s stance can amount to the assertion that any thought we have must be able to be accompanied by the “I think,” which unites any and all of our possible

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 71; *SW*, I, 162.

<sup>50</sup> See Paul Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Skepticism in German Idealism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 18 – 19.

representations. This also brings Schelling much closer the Cartesian foundationalist tradition. Thus, even though we might not necessarily utter “I think” in any particular knowledge claim, such claims, no matter how non-basic, presuppose this I as a maximally broad unity connecting our inferences. Indeed, Schelling thinks as much and makes reference to this line of reasoning.<sup>51</sup>

Yet at the same time, it seems odd to claim that the whole of nature, of being, and of thinking as well as anything in particular therein participates in this I in an immediate fashion. For even the weaker demand that our knowledge can be interconnected, descending from a long and potentially complex genealogy of non-basic to basic principles, is still incredibly demanding. And when we keep in mind that for Schelling the I is, a structurally minimal active and mutually determining reflexivity and therefore not merely the possibility of the accompaniment of the “I think,” even more challenges arise.

That, for instance, H<sub>2</sub>O is water seems to have no immediate relation to reflexivity, and reciprocity. Perhaps it may be argued that it does so to activity in the trivial sense that this statement follows from the act of discursively uttering, discovering or simply understanding such a fact. But Schelling wants to also make a stronger claim: there is activity in the absolute that sustains such a fact. However, in contrast it is much more digestible, though still questionable, to assert that this fact has a mediate relation to these notions in that everything ultimately derives from an all-encompassing and self-grounding and absolute unity. In other words, if everything within the absolute is part of the absolute, and the basic features of the absolute bear these properties, then everything

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<sup>51</sup> Schelling, “Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy,” 85; *SW*, I, 182.

within the absolute do so to some degree as well. Most of this claim is implied by any form of monism only with the added problematic baggage brought by the implied *causa sui*. But, again, Schelling also wants to state the stronger claim that such properties are present in such a fact in an ongoing fashion.

To make sense of this stance in this era of Schelling's Fichtean-inspired thinking comes down to some very thorny implications that touch on Schelling's much later complaints of Fichte's all-destroying absolute subject brought up in the prior chapter. In essence, Schelling insists that everything is circumscribed by the I and its properties, and everything exists in and through this I:

If *substance* is the same as the unconditional, *then the I is the only substance*. If there were several substances there would be an I outside the I, which makes no sense. Therefore *everything that is is in the I, and outside the I is nothing*. For the I contains all reality . . . and everything that is, is through reality. Therefore everything is in the I. . . . Everything is only *in* the I and *for* the I. The I itself is only *for* itself.<sup>52</sup>

The full comprehensibility (however much that is in the end) of this standpoint trades on another problematic claim. This is the claim that all objectivity, formalized as the not-I, derives ultimately from the absolute I. But here this constitutes the position that the absolute I posits the entirety of reality, its own negation, and itself in a continuous manner. This is in part the cost of rejecting the thing in itself while maintaining an absolute subject. Not only does the absolute seem to pull itself, in the words of Nietzsche, "by the hair from the swamps of nothingness up into existence," but it actively sustains all of nothingness and existence as well.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, this stance is one Schelling will

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 93; *SW*, I, 193.

<sup>53</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Judith Norman, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 21.



somewhat back away from for reasons discussed earlier, but it should be reiterated that this absolute I is not any particular individual, but can be understood as the foil to Spinoza's absolute. Thus, in abstraction the idea simply is that the entirety of reality reduces down to the unconditional positing of the absolute I, where the inverse of this lies in the conception of reality that reduces down to the rigidly deterministic machinations of Spinoza's absolute as nature/God.

Although the problematic nature of Schelling's absolute I at this point seems undeniable, there are already lines of thinking here that Schelling will later adapt, somewhat lightening his position, and making it marginally more appealing and tenable. The obvious fault line of tension of his position of subjective idealism is the all-destroying subjectivity of the I which wipes out any meaningful way to claim the existence of difference, the objective realm, as well as necessity. Schelling will come to weaken his foundationalism whereby he will sway from his absolute subject and attempt to offer a much more neutral view of the absolute that makes room for such things.

As such, Schelling will later endeavor to straddle the line between two different positions that are as easy to assert as they are difficult to maintain. On the one hand, he will aim to avoid claiming frictionless insight into a completely unconditioned, unified absolute. This view carries with it reductive problems discussed in relation to Spinoza and Fichte, not to mention the problems in claiming its own self-genesis. On the other hand, Schelling will also seek to avoid submitting to a position whereby no unity can ever be achieved, where all that exists is a realm of disjointed difference that, in everything discussed thus far, he clearly is opposed to. Instead, Schelling will adopt a position where all that participates in the absolute aims to self-organize and manifest the formal features

of its principle as an end without quite hitting the mark or being able to maintain or hold onto such a notion. And this is because of the very nature of the absolute itself.

Though not a position consistently maintained as Schelling's thought progresses, this view is already found in early works like 1799's *First Outline of the Philosophy of Nature*. Speaking of nature's failure to achieve a lasting unity, Schelling attributes this failure as also the ground of nature's very own activities:

Nature is the *laziest of animals* and curses separation because it imposes upon it the necessity of activity; Nature is active only in order to rid itself of this compulsion. The opposites must forever shun, in order forever to seek each other; and forever seek, in order never to find each other; it is only in *this* contradiction that the ground of all the activity of Nature lies.<sup>54</sup>

This notion of a foundation that is fundamentally conflicted gets reasserted as well in later works as well. For instance, in 1810's "Stuttgart Seminars," upon explaining the central views of his philosophy of identity, will assert that the identity of the subject and object encapsulated by his principle of  $A=A$  is one also marked by a so-called "axiological difference" between the real and ideal.<sup>55</sup> This I treat in further detail in the next chapter.

The challenge then rightfully arises: in what sense will such view instantiate foundationalist thinking at all? As stated above, it seems any foundationalist must at a minimum maintain the thesis that whatever one's first principles may be, they must ground in a self-evident way all possible knowledge such that a chain of sound inferences must eventually return to this ground. But if the world itself is marred by conflict and

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<sup>54</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans., Keith R. Peterson, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 231; *SW*, III, 324.

<sup>55</sup> Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 202; *SW*, VII, 428.

difference, one that fails to achieve unity everywhere, how can it be said that our knowledge of the world itself can achieve this aim?

What Schelling will attempt to do is keep with such a position by maintaining that we instead have insight into a ground-level feeling of striving, one which is innate and evident in all that exists. Everything in reality will emerge out of this striving venturing to realize the features of unity. Additionally, Schelling will claim that we can in fact demonstrate or construct the ways in which particular forms of knowledge ultimately find their place in this greater unity.<sup>56</sup> This construction is carried out by abstracting away from our observations and reflections on, for instance, the empirical sciences, history, and our own finitude.

As different as this move away from a stronger foundationalist position appears to be, Schelling already in 1795 acknowledges this weaker position, holding both as compatible with one another. Schelling here suggests that we can always lose insight into the foundational and absolute I. He goes on to raise the question of how we are conscious of the alleged freedom of the absolute I. Responding to this, Schelling proclaims in a proto-existentialist moment that our insight into the absolute and freedom is one with which we are condemned to wrestle. It is a freedom tainted by our own standpoint, one which we must strive to maintain despite our finite and conditioned nature:

Are you considering in any way that the I is no longer the pure, absolute I once it occurs in consciousness[?] . . . Self-awareness implies the danger of losing the I. It is not a free act of the immutable but an unfree urge that induces the mutable I, conditioned by the not-I, to strive to maintain its identity and reassert itself in the undertow of endless change. (Or do you really feel free in your self-awareness?) But that striving of the empirical I, and the consciousness stemming from it, would itself not be possible without the freedom of the absolute I, and absolute freedom is equally necessary as a condition for both imagination and action. For

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<sup>56</sup> See Schelling, "Further Presentations," 395; *SW*, IV, 408 – 409.

your empirical I would never strive to save its identity if the absolute I were not originally posited by itself, as pure identity, and out of its absolute power. If you want to attain this freedom as something objective, whether you want to comprehend it or deny it, you will always fail, because freedom consists in the very fact that it excludes all that is not-I absolutely.<sup>57</sup>

Our actions and thoughts, then, are in part informed by our inability to fully capture and manifest in an objective manner this active, absolute freedom, which nevertheless grounds this striving.

This standpoint raises the important question of how Schelling can even begin to claim we have access to this absolute if we cannot make it objective. For what does it even mean to say that the absolute exists as the foundation of our thinking and being although we always fail to capture it objectively? Immediately following the above passage, Schelling introduces us to his (and Fichte's) infamous concept of intellectual intuition, which is said to provide us with non-discursive access to the absolute. Such a notion is worthy of lengthy discussion, but to state it quickly, Schelling believes that, unlike in the Kantian system where our epistemic insights are relegated to objects of possible experience and their place in sensible intuition, we possess an intellectual intuition that somehow provides us with immediate and unadulterated insight into the absolute.<sup>58</sup>

At a minimum, there is an expressibility paradox latent in such a claim. Schelling wants to say that the absolute I is active, non-objective, unconditioned, and therefore not expressible by language and grasped by our finite perspective. Somehow, we nonetheless have insight into the absolute despite Schelling's assertion that language fails to capture

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<sup>57</sup> Schelling, "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy," 84-5; *SW*, I, 180-1.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

such things, which is itself an linguistic insight into the absolute.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, there is a historical-dialectical criticism that can confront any form of foundationalism of this type: we do not simply arrive at an unconditioned grounding principle in its abstraction. Any form of thinking we bring to bear on such a claim presupposes a temporal process and a historical background and culturally tempered conceptual apparatus, that thereby leaves any alleged insight haunted by our conditioned nature.

The latter claim Schelling does not seem to deny as was present in the above cited reflection on human freedom. Still, he does seem to simply reject the challenge as it stands, begging the question by asserting the priority of intellectual intuition. And the former claim of inexpressibility will also be something Schelling will not necessarily deny, which is what leads him to some very unappealing mystical declarations. This side of Schelling will speak of the realm of our finitude and conditionality, rather than the supposed unconditioned absolute, as in fact the illusory of the two.

For instance, in 1797's "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge," Schelling will assert that the epistemic judgments we make suffer the consequence of being broken down into determinate and finite statements that fail to express what Schelling sees as the intrinsically active and processual nature of things: "It is an inevitable plight of philosophy that it must break down into individual moments and acts what, in the human spirit itself, is but one act and one moment."<sup>60</sup> Taken alone, such

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Vater reaches a similar conclusion in his Introduction to Schelling's 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*. See Michael Vater, "Introduction," in *System of Transcendental Idealism*, F.W.J. Schelling, xxvii.

<sup>60</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge," in *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays (1797-1810)*, trans. Thomas Pfau (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 97; *SW*, I, 394.

an assertion is not necessarily problematic. However, reiterating the theme of a constitutive striving within us to transcend our finite nature, Schelling goes on to speak in a Spinozistic manner of the annihilating aspect of the world viewed from the high ground of intellectual intuition:

It is a thrust [Schwung] that the spirit affords itself beyond all finitude. It annihilates, as it were, all finitude for itself, and only in this absolute positivity does it have an intuition of itself. This self-determination of the spirit is called the will [Wollen]. The spirit wills, and it is free. That it wills cannot be grounded any further. For precisely because this act occurs unconditionally [schlechthin] it constitutes will. By annihilating through the act all objectness for itself, the spirit has nothing left for itself but the pure form of its will, [which is] henceforth the eternal law of its activity.<sup>61</sup>

Still, there is a kind of intellectual honesty in Schelling's admission that the spirit's will to supersede its finitude "cannot be grounded any further."

Perhaps there is a better reading of what Schelling only inconsistently suggests. This would be that his inability to finally satisfy in a non-contradictory manner the need for a complete justification of his system is not a bug but a feature. This is to say that the feeling of striving we are said to have betrays the true nature of his conception of the absolute. Striving might be seen as the unarticulated hunch we have of a structural tension endemic to existence as a whole, a tension whose formal articulations seem only to amount to overt contradictions in that such contradictions in fact demarcate the fundamentals of reality. In this way, we might read Schelling as offering us a realist position on the status of paradox, a paradoxical foundationalism, though he himself never resolutely conceives of such a standpoint. However, even if this is a better way to read

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 98; *SW*, I, 394-5.

him, and even if these impasses are actually inextricably bound to ontology, is there any chance for this standpoint can be taken seriously?

This notion of striving appears later, too. Near the outset of his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling brings up the need for knowledge to bottom out in a foundation just as he did in 1795's "Of the I." However, rather than leap into declarations of complete and immediate insight into the absolute, Schelling speaks of "*the covert feeling*" we have of an epistemic connection to such a foundation.<sup>62</sup> As such, we can see even better the sense in which Schelling's foundationalism remains, weakened to be sure, but as that which nonetheless locates insight by way of feeling, a striving toward the notion of a founding principle, though one that we do not comprehend instantaneously. "It is the task of philosophy," Schelling writes, "to resolve this covert feeling into overt concepts, by exhibiting the connection [to the absolute] in question, and the major linkages therein."<sup>63</sup>

Following his assertion of the covert feeling we have of an absolute foundation to our knowledge, Schelling discusses once again how to gain insight into it. His claim now turns on the stance that we can reach this absolute if we can "*find a point at which the object and its concept, the thing and its presentation, are originally, absolutely and immediately one.*"<sup>64</sup> Bearing in mind his new position that from the perspective of the absolute, subjectivity and objectivity dissolve, Schelling will go on to reason (though properly speaking much is just simply asserted) that we need to find such a point because

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<sup>62</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 23; SW, III, 363.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

it is precisely where subject and object combine: “Now since presentation is the subjective, while being is the objective, the task, in a nutshell, consists of *finding the point at which subject and object are immediately one.*”<sup>65</sup> And shortly after in 1801’s “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” Schelling takes this unity of the subject and object as  $A=A$ , rather than just the I, as the basis of his *Identitätssystem*. More than this, he will assert that such an insight is a matter of “unique unconditioned cognition.”<sup>66</sup>

A year later in his 1802 dialogue *Bruno*, we see some of the more of the mystical moments Schelling’s foundationalism sometimes implies. While by now Schelling has clearly moved away from a Fichtean-type all-consuming notion of absolute subjectivity, Schelling admits here of his own all-consuming absolute, one that washes away not just objectivity but also subjectivity. Thus, rather than avoiding the respective pitfalls of each of Spinoza and Fichte’s systems discussed in Chapter 1, Schelling will in a way openly embrace both of them. For in *Bruno*, Schelling suggests that insight into the absolute brings with it a certain commitment to the ephemerality and relative nature of all the finite things before us in the world.<sup>67</sup> Thus, rather than just worry about the total loss of subjectivity as is the case with Spinoza, or the total loss of objectivity as is the case with Fichte, the disappearance of both subjectivity and objectivity is embraced as a feature by Schelling.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 24; *SW*, III, 364.

<sup>66</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” §7, 351; *SW*, IV, 117.

<sup>67</sup> F.W.J Schelling, *Bruno, or, On the Natural and the Divine Principle of Things (1802)*, trans. Michael G. Vater, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 167.



Furthermore, in this text, Schelling will continue to make reference to intellectual intuition, a “supersensible intuition,” as that which allows us to access the absolute.<sup>68</sup> Schelling, speaking in the dialogue through his mouthpiece Bruno, will come close to outright admitting the inexpressibility and paradoxicality of gaining insight into the absolute in this fashion:

Accordingly, to discern the eternal within things means to see thought and being united in them through its essence alone . . . Nevertheless, it is difficult to express the inner essence of the eternal in mortal words, since language is derived from images and is created by the understanding. . . . If you could find the right words for expressing an activity that is as motionless as the deepest rest, and for a rest that is as energetic as the peak of activity, you would manage to some extent to approximate in concepts the nature of that most perfect being.<sup>69</sup>

Now, although this survey is not at all comprehensive, I believe it provides sufficient evidence to point out that Schelling appears to hold three different but often concurrent positions on the question of our access to the unconditioned and the nature of intellectual intuition: (1) we possess an intellectual intuition, or as he says in 1801, a cognition that provides us with direct insight into the absolute; (2) innate to our finitude is a striving that pushes us away from the finite toward the absolute; (3) our ability to express the nature of the absolute is adulterated by our own standpoint, and may or may not be paradoxical. Taken on its own, (1) seems to be the most straightforwardly foundationalist position. (2) and (3) appear to be fairly compatible with one another but seem to obfuscate the status of (1).

At his most consistent, Schelling’s later thinking on intellectual intuition can be read in all three senses with (2) and (3) being the primary modes of our relationship to the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 203; *SW*, IV, 307.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 199 – 201; *SW*, IV, 302 – 305.

absolute. (1) then arises at privileged points in the thinking subject who arrives at the latent formal insights of the absolute but only after a long and historical process that culminates in such an understanding along with the line of thought which brought the thinking subject there.<sup>70</sup> Still, even with this more consistent view, it can be asked how Schelling can meaningfully claim that the alleged striving at the basis of all that exists is exactly the striving for ontological structure or what earlier in his career he captured formally with the I, which he claimed direct access of *via* intellectual intuition. Besides this, there is also the issue if there is any sort of striving in us at all, not to mention in everything.

The short answer is that he never really comes to terms with such problems. In his lecture on Hegel in his earlier discussed 1830s *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling will offer a fairly revisionist self-reading that renders his own position more consistent than it admittedly is. In this lecture, he addresses Hegel's criticism (stated roughly above as a historical-dialectical criticism of foundationalism) of Schelling's stronger foundationalist conception of intellectual intuition. This criticism is that Schelling's notion is inadequate in that it arrives at a foundationalist picture of the absolute artificially, abstracting from the process in which it is sought and comes about as a result, as if the absolute were simply there waiting to be discovered.<sup>71</sup> Schelling will

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<sup>70</sup> Schelling describes this in his *On the History of Modern Philosophy* as follows: "The individual I finds in its consciousness only, as it were, the monuments, the memorials of that path, not the path itself. But for that very reason it is the task of science, indeed of the primal science, philosophy, to make that I of consciousness come to itself, i.e., into consciousness, *with consciousness*. Or: it is the task of philosophy that the I of consciousness should *itself* cover the whole path from the beginning of its being-outside-itself to the highest consciousness—with consciousness. Philosophy is, as such, nothing but an anamnesis, a remembrance for the I of what it has done and suffered in its general (its pre-individual) being (Seyn)." Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 110; *SW*, X, 94 – 95.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 151; *SW*, X, 148-9.

claim that really his notion of intellectual intuition as offering insight into the absolute really all along was a sort of striving. Rather than the stronger claim criticized here and enunciated in (1), Schelling writes of his earlier conception of intellectual intuition:

One does not even yet have it as something which is really thought, i.e. as something which has been logically realised; it is rather from the very beginning merely what is *wanted*; ‘the pistol from which it is fired’ is the mere wanting of that which is, which, though, in contradiction with not being able to gain possession of that which is, with not being able to bring it to a halt, is immediately carried away into the progressing and pulling movement, in which being (*das Seyende*) behaves until the end as that which is never realised, and must first be realised. . . . That which is absolutely mobile, of which I just spoke, which is continually an other, which cannot be held onto for a moment, which is only really thought in the last moment (take good note of this expression!) – how does this relate to thought? Obviously not even as a real object of thought; for by “object” one understands something which keeps still, which stands still, which remains. It is not really an object, but rather the mere *material* of thought throughout the whole science; for real thought expresses itself precisely only in the continual determination and formation of this which is in itself indeterminate, of this which is never the same as itself, which always becomes an other. This first basis, this true *prima materia* of all thought, cannot, therefore, be what is really thought, not be what is thought in the sense that the single formation is.<sup>72</sup>

Here Schelling leans on the above positions of (2) and (3) as his true intentions when discussing at least his own post-Fichtean (1801 and on) reflections into the absolute and the nature of intellectual intuition. However, as was just mentioned, this is no doubt an overly charitable self-interpretation that seems to read the systematicity of Hegel’s own dialectics back into Schelling’s less consistent foundationalist thinking. Nonetheless, there is a legitimate sense in which Schelling is right that this position is present in an enduring form in his work, appearing earlier than he even acknowledges in the quote above.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 151-2; *SW*, X, 149-150.

#### IV. Lawless Foundations: The Ungrounding of Schelling's Foundationalism

In 1809's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, Schelling will reconceive of his foundationalist style of thinking, applying some of its basic features in relation to ethics, theodicy, and a pantheistic or Spinoza inflected conception of the absolute as God.<sup>73</sup> One of the crucial moves in this text is Schelling's mobilization of the distinction between ground and existence.<sup>74</sup> Ground, we might say, is the foundation of existence. However, for Schelling, the ground is not merely a foundationalist principle, but something strongly ontological but also theological. That is, it is not just something that conditions mere things that exist.<sup>75</sup> Strikingly, Schelling will include God's own existence in this picture.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, Schelling imbues this distinction with an ethical dimension, though this is beyond the scope of this chapter. Suffice it to say that Schelling will utilize these notions of ground and existence specifically to offer a mystical but innovative theodical account of good and evil in relation to his conception of God. In brief, the motivation behind the distinction is that it allows him to mitigate the contradictions associated with the classic theological dilemma of how evil and an

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<sup>73</sup> I suggest bearing in mind that his notion of God, as with many of his other concepts, by and large (though admittedly not completely) takes on a minimalist sort of definition that results from his monism. "[I]f pantheism denotes nothing more than the doctrine of the immanence of things in God, every rational viewpoint in some sense must be drawn to this doctrine. But precisely the sense here makes the difference." F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom (1809)*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 11; *SW*, VII, 338-9.

"Whoever finally would want to name this system pantheism, because all oppositions disappear considered simply in relation to the absolute, may also be granted this indulgence." *Ibid.*, 71; *SW*, VII, 408.

<sup>74</sup> Schelling notes that ground and existence build on his 1801 "Presentation of My System of Philosophy." Schelling does briefly use these terms, though his distinction in 1801 is quite underdeveloped in relation to his 1809 essay. See *Ibid.*, 27; *SW*, VII, 357.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 40; *SW*, VII, 371 – 372.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 42; *SW*, VII, 373 – 374.

omnipotent God could coexist, while also providing Schelling with a general explanatory apparatus to better account for how individuals can function with relative independence internal to absolute.

Setting aside the essay's mystical and theological themes, I would like to conclude this chapter by briefly touching on one aspect Schelling suggests about his notion of ground, namely that it itself is groundless. In my opinion, this claim offers one final important conceptual innovation to his foundationalist thought. It is an innovation which perhaps will also mark both his foundationalism's culmination and undoing. Due to the 1809 treatise's richness, I will set aside an analysis of its nuances and problems as well as areas where the essential features of his foundationalism are employed.<sup>77</sup>

Put quickly, Schelling claims that ground in itself has an anarchistic and incomprehensible element to it, an "indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground."<sup>78</sup> He will go on to say that there is something "*before* all ground ... the original ground or the *non-ground* [*Ungrund*]."<sup>79</sup> Moreover, he will connect this notion of the non-ground with a key term employed in his philosophy of identity, namely indifference or *Indifferenz*. In 1801's "Presentation," Schelling's opening definition in that text, that of absolute reason, is defined as such only if "it is conceived as the total indifference of

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<sup>77</sup> It is worth pointing out that this text was released in a collection which contained, amongst other earlier texts, 1795's "Of the I." In the preface to the collection, Schelling writes of this essay that it "shows idealism in its most youthful guise and, perhaps, in a sense that it subsequently lost. At least the I is still taken everywhere as absolute or as identity of the subjective and objective and not as subjective." *Ibid.*, 3; *SW*, VII, 333.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 29; *SW*, VII, 359-60.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 68; *SW*, VI, 406.

the subjective and objective.”<sup>80</sup> This total indifference point is, as mentioned earlier, captured by the A=A and functions as the founding principle of Schelling’s *Identitätssystem*. But now in 1809, Schelling will claim the non-ground is precisely this absolute point of indifference.<sup>81</sup>

I think Schelling’s thesis of an anarchistic element within his notion of a foundational ground signifies a departure (or as close to one as perhaps we can get) with his foundationalist thought. For there is now something avowedly anti-foundational about his foundation. On the one hand, Schelling makes clear that all existence finds its basis in and so must be built upon this ground. But, on the other hand, Schelling also openly claims that this ground possesses an impenetrable character. This, perhaps, amounts to the admission that the earlier professed privileged circularity of his foundationalism cannot fully do his notion of ground justice. Everything that exists, though rule-bound, ordered, and conditioned, operates on the basis of a ground that itself seems to have a lawless element. “[A]narchy [*das Regellose*],” Schelling writes, “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.”<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps this position is not actually much of a departure from Schelling’s earliest writings. After all, Schelling’s notion of an unconditioned absolute itself implies a sort of conditionlessness or lawlessness at the basis of the absolute in that the absolute itself supplies the basis of law. This raises the question as to whether or not there is a

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<sup>80</sup> Schelling, “Presentation,” 349; *SW*, IV, 114.

<sup>81</sup> Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations*, 68; *SW*, VI, 405.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 29; *SW*, VII, 359.

meaningful distinction between Schelling's foundationalist project and a system based in something ultimately unfounded. If this very unfoundedness itself functions as the foundation of Schelling's system, the line between the two is blurred. But Schelling's claim is not that everything as a result is unfounded. After all, we can always construct axiomatic systems that are internally coherent but founded on principles themselves unfounded. Or maybe the insight is that many different principles can get us to where we need to go. That is, different principles can found different systems, but still lead to an internal cohesion. Maybe Schelling could not quite pull this off, but maybe the different versions of his foundationalism attest him trying.

### Chapter 3: Rhythmic Alienation – On Schellingian Negativity, Frege’s Concept and Object, Intellectual Illusion, and Postulation

On this height I often stand, my Bellarmin! But an instant of reflection hurls me down. I reflect, and find myself as I was before—alone, with all the griefs of mortality, and my heart's refuge, the world in its eternal oneness, is gone; Nature closes her arms, and I stand like an alien before her and do not understand her.

— Friedrich Hölderlin<sup>1</sup>

In the prior chapter I argued that Schelling advances a theory of foundationalism in his earlier work and that despite some significant modifications to his project, several major concepts of his thinking—unconditionality, activity, reflexivity, and reciprocity—remain and are mobilized in various guises throughout the course of his career. At first, these features were attributed to Schelling’s Fichte-inspired absolute subject or I. In his *Identitätssystem*, Schelling generalizes the principle of his conception of the absolute, shifting it to the notion of an absolute being, and making subjectivity’s place in this world a derivative but culminating element of it. Both positions, however, aimed to capture a maximal conception of unity and so constitute different iterations of Schelling’s monism.

On its own Schelling’s principle and its features offer no clear rules by which the world abides. That reality is inherently active, reflexive, etc., does not illustrate how this is so. In a sense, then, the exposition offered so far has only described a Schellingian system of activity without activity, reflexivity without reflection, and reciprocity without reciprocation.

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, “Hyperion, or the Hermit in Greece” (1797), trans., Willard R. Trask, in *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, ed., Eric L. Santer (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1990), 4.



Thus, in this chapter I wish to further concretize Schelling's thinking. To do so, I extract the basic rules underlying much of Schelling's reasoning, drawing primarily on 1800's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. While Schelling's approach manifests in various guises before and after the *System*, this text marks a crucial turning point, a bridge if you will, between the different major positions of his monism. Additionally, the work presents the earlier Schelling at perhaps his most methodical. In this text, we find a decisive elaboration of Schelling's key mechanism that propels his thought, what I call *negativity*. This notion offers us a way to analyze the behavior of reality, to see how the world is active, reflexive, reciprocal, and how it can be otherwise.

Negativity, I also argue, can be understood as operating in a manner analogous to a concept's relationship to its object within Frege's logic. To draw out this analogy, I briefly evoke some of Frege's writings on the latter issue. Reading Schelling against this comparison, I then track some of the inconsistencies in Schelling's thinking in his *System*. I go on to extract some of Schelling's reflections on this mechanism and its relationship to his idea of postulation as well as his own thinking on formal systems. This will lead us to a means to evaluate Schelling's thinking on the issue of the subject-object divide and the mind-body problem at large. Along the way, we will see the manner in which Schelling believes this divide manifests as a variety of intellectual illusions, errors that appear before us precisely because of the structure of reality itself.

### **I. At the Cost of the Other: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity**

In his 1910 essay "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description", Bertrand Russell highlights in passing a curious danger that comes with speaking of presentation, advocating for the word acquaintance in its place. This latter term is said to

be the converse of the relation of presentation without the same associations and philosophical baggage. According to Russell,

in speaking of presentation, we may so emphasize the object as to lose sight of the subject. The result of this is either to lead to the view that there is no subject, whence we arrive at materialism; or to lead to the view that what is presented is part of the subject, whence we arrive at idealism, and should arrive at solipsism but for the most desperate contortions.<sup>2</sup>

Aiming to preserve what he calls a fundamental fact of cognition—the subject-object distinction—while avoiding its latent asymmetrical trap, Russell writes of the notion of acquaintance, whereby a subject is acquainted with an object, instead of the notion of presentation, whereby an object is presented to a subject. Still, if Russell goes so far as to admit of the problematic status of the language of presentation, one might ask if this problem is at all mitigated in utilizing a term that is openly said to be the converse of such an act.

At the outset of Schelling’s Introduction to his *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling writes of just this issue Russell adumbrates. As with Russell, Schelling claims that the dichotomy of the subject and object is fundamental to cognition or, more precisely, knowledge as the latter tends to speak of such matters. Moreover, Schelling locates this same problematic asymmetry in the distinction, one whereby either the subject or object may be emphasized at the cost of the other. However, for Schelling this issue is not one to be curtailed by way of semantic reassociation. Rather it is “undoubtedly the supreme problem of all knowledge . . . [and] undoubtedly the main

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<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11, Vol. 11 (1910), 109.

problem of philosophy.”<sup>3</sup> In this transitional text, one which stands between two periods of Schelling’s early thought—between his Fichtean apprenticeship with its experiments in *Naturphilosophie*, and his own *Identitätssystem* to come—the *System* attempts to surmount the challenge of falling into the exclusivity of materialism or idealism. The thesis of the book is that one may begin with one position and derive the other. Its method is to begin with Fichtean-inspired transcendental idealism, that is, to begin with an investigation of the conditions of subjectivity and possible knowledge, and arrive at the objective world allegedly captured by Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, which behaves in a manner parallel but separate to the workings of subjectivity itself.

The notion of a choice of where to begin in philosophy, the decision between subjectivity or objectivity, finds its attestation in Fichte. Responding to the Jacobian challenge that one may only have a Spinozistic system of philosophy, a philosophy of mechanical objectivity that arrives ultimately at fatalism, or no consistent system at all, where *faith* in the freedom of the subject is the only alternative, Fichte presents his elaboration of the Kantian framework as the true *systematic* alternative to Spinozism, or as he frequently calls it, dogmatism.

In his First Introduction to the *Science of Knowledge*, Fichte frames the issue between dogmatism and idealism in a Russellian manner: “The dispute between the idealist and the dogmatist is, in reality, about whether the independence of the thing should be sacrificed to the independence of the self, or, conversely, the independence of the self to that of the thing.”<sup>4</sup> To be sure, dogmatism as Spinozism is not materialism as

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<sup>3</sup> Schelling, *System*, 7; *SW*, III, 342 – 343.

<sup>4</sup> Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, 14.

Russell speaks of it, but the point remains: either subjectivity gains precedence and objects are subsumed under it, or *vice versa*. However, unlike Schelling's 1800 *System*, Fichte sees no complementary coexistence between the two frameworks.<sup>5</sup> For Fichte there is an "absolute incompatibility" between the two, one that "annihilates the conclusions of the other; hence their fusion necessarily leads to inconsistency."<sup>6</sup>

The importance of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, aside from it being perhaps Schelling's most methodical work, is in its articulation of a new alternative to the Jacobian dilemma.<sup>7</sup> Schelling offers us a third iteration of the possible responses to the question of freedom or system, one which opts for a conjunctive response in the face of Fichte's and Jacobi's varying disjunctive positions. This response is one which affirms the opposition between the two systems' positions while nonetheless rejecting the notion of inconsistency between them. Such a response should appear suspicious on two counts. First and at best, the idea that there can be at once a system of transcendental idealism as well as a system of a naturalistic objectivity should suggest over-explanations of any given phenomenon. Second, the notion of two systems likely results in overt explanatory contradictions.

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<sup>5</sup> At times Schelling's language may seem to suggest that he is in accord with Fichte. Schelling admits in his Foreword to the *System* that transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature "must forever be opposed to one another, and never merge into one", but he also asserts just before that the two are not "adequate" by themselves. This difference is what sets Schelling here apart from Fichte while also suggesting the former's avoidance of an outright break with the latter. See Schelling, *System*, 2; *SW*, III, 330-1.

<sup>6</sup> Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> As Jiří Černý notes: "this work of Schelling is rightly regarded as the first great dialectic-historical philosophical system, which even anticipates Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*." Jiří Černý, "Von der *natura naturans* zum »unvordenklichen Seyn« Eine Linie des Materialismus bei Schelling?" in *Natur und geschichtlicher Prozeß: Studien zur Naturphilosophie F.W.J. Schellings*, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984), 131. My translation.

Schelling's account indeed fails, but I think that analyzing and understanding his approach by focusing on some of his latent conception of negativity and his references to the idea of formal systems, specifically geometry and the importance of the idea of a postulate, can yield some important insights. His claim is that a system must be grounded in a postulate which inaugurates the former and allows for a progressive demonstration of it. His attempted 'parallelism' between Fichte-style transcendental idealism and Spinoza-inspired *Naturphilosophie*, while not consistent in his 1800 text, is not so much a matter of two systems stitched together as it is one system clumsily articulated partly as a result of a half-dedication to the Fichtean premise of absolute subjectivity, which Schelling openly moves beyond in the following year with 1801's "Presentation of My System of Philosophy."

## **II. All Determination is Negation: The Basics of Schellingian Negativity**

Schelling's premise in the *System* is that contrary to a static opposition between subjectivity and objectivity (and the related oppositions of thinking and being, knowing itself and the objects of knowing, activity and passivity, etc.) there is a processual one instead. Here we might conceive of a static opposition under the classic guise of substance dualism, or even dualism in its Kantian form, where the point is that there is a permanent and insurmountable separation asserted between whatever opposition is at play, e.g., *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, the phenomenal and noumenal, etc. In contrast to this, the thesis that the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is processual means that subjectivity passes into objectivity, and *vice versa*—a claim, perhaps, *prima facie* strange. The trick is in being able to meaningfully articulate this passage without demolishing the distinction in one form or another, and without arriving at the

philosophical position of materialism-as-dogmatism or idealism, as is implied by Russell and Fichte's respective reflections on the issue.

Schelling's diagnosis is that this problematic tension between subjectivity and objectivity that leads to a system's termination in idealism or materialism (as well as certain other philosophical positions Schelling will note) is the result of failing to heed to what he views as the processual character of thinking, as well as reality, as such.<sup>8</sup> Here we locate Schelling's central notion of activity, which claims its inheritance from Spinoza's *natura naturans*, and which treats of reality as fundamentally active, as premised in a constant state of becoming. As we will see, Schelling will claim this primary property of reality may be overlooked upon observation and reflection. Which philosophical system one arrives at, then, in part will depend on what stage of thinking about the world or the subject one mistakenly stops at (possibly because of a philosophical problem), and takes as paramount.<sup>9</sup> Schelling, in fact, will mark out certain areas during the course of his 1800 exposition where particular philosophical positions crop up, explaining them away, albeit in a cursory fashion, as if they were mere mirages of a greater process—the active becoming of reality itself. This is to say Schelling views thinking and reality itself as error-prone whereby the contours of thought and the world can themselves mislead us into misinterpreting reality. Falling for such illusions,

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<sup>8</sup> What reality means here is left ambiguous. Schelling will keep with this idea after his break with Fichte, but the notion of reality captured by his post-Fichtean *Identitätssystem* is different from the one here in the *System*.

<sup>9</sup> This approach, which is only rendered in passing moments by Schelling, can very well be seen as an early instantiation of "error-first ontology." For a discussion of this notion, see Adrian Johnston, "Whither the Transcendental?: Hegel, Analytic Philosophy, and the Prospects of a Realist Transcendentalism Today," *Crisis and Critique*, special issue: "Philosophy and Science," ed. Agon Hamza and Frank Ruda, vol. 5, no. 1, 2018; Adrian Johnston, "Meta-Transcendentalism and Error-First Ontology: The Cases of Gilbert Simondon and Catherine Malabou," *Rethinking the Milestones: Studies in Contemporary Realism*, ed. Gregor Kroupa and Jure Simoniti, London: Bloomsbury, 2018.

Schelling believes one may concoct full-blown philosophical systems—likely a development of Kant’s own dialectic of illusion.

Schelling’s reasoning has it that in taking a higher-level stance and observing the thinking that leads one to any particular system of thought, whereby one loses sight of either the subject or object, the temptation to adopt an erroneous position can be overcome. This tendency of thought reveals a characteristic of thinking itself. This characteristic, overlooked precisely because it is the culprit responsible for this act of overlooking or misrecognition, is called negativity.<sup>10</sup> Naturally for Schelling, negativity turns out to not only be a central attribute of thinking, but of reality as well.

Schellingian negativity as a notion should be defined as a complex of rules about the nature of thought and reality rather than one simple thing. However, these rules require a fair amount of unpacking. To put it quickly, negativity is the general heading for the oppositional relations Schelling sees as fundamental to thought/reality. Schelling’s monism may be (perhaps misleadingly) spoken of as dual-aspect precisely because of these posited oppositions. Negativity, we might say, describes the condition of relations that generates such oppositions. Schelling’s use of the idea, often spoken of implicitly, though sometimes explicitly as “negation,” “the negative,” and with the prefixes “non-” or “not-,” does not figure thematically in his 1800 text, but as a background assumption unceremoniously introduced in his writing.

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<sup>10</sup> It goes without saying this concept takes on a much more developed form in Hegel. There are several similarities and differences between Hegel’s version of negativity and Schelling’s that I cannot discuss. A helpful and brief overview of Hegel’s conception can be found in: Dieter Henrich, “The Logic of Negation and Its Application”, in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 316 – 331.

Here it may be good to stray briefly into a discussion of this issue. Schelling's relationship to the notion of negativity marks out an important driving force for the arc of his own thinking. Furthermore, discussing this may provide some passing evidence of Schelling's maintenance of this concept throughout the periods with which I am concerned. The reason Schelling underemphasizes negativity in the *System*, I believe, is two-fold.

On the one hand, the short answer is that Schelling does spend time in his earliest essays, particularly 1795's "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy" discussing the notion, most conspicuously in the guise of the not- or non-I, which in turn derives from Schelling's adoption and (sometimes incorrect) synopses of large portions of Fichte's own method in the *Science of Knowledge*. In that text, Fichte's notion of negation is given an extensive treatment, being the pivotal element that allows the principle of the absolute I to generate out of itself the non- or not-I which then unfolds into the increasingly elaborate workings of his system.

On the other hand, in spite of this, the earlier Schelling does not really critically reflect on the concept. This is to say that aside from explaining how it figures mechanically into his (Fichte-inspired) system as a propelling force of analysis, Schelling is evasive of the deeper issue of just what negativity is. For instance, in "Of the I" Schelling remarks:

That absolutely counterposited not-I, in fact, is not absolutely unthinkable . . . But by itself it has no reality, not even a thinkable one. Just because it is counterposited to the I, it is posited as sheer negation, as an absolute nothing about which one can say nothing, nothing at all, except that it is mere antithesis to all reality.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Schelling, "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy," 90; *SW*, I, 188.



In an earlier footnote in the same text, Schelling admits that there is no explanation for the existence of negativity. Still only in nascent Fichtean form, the question of the origin of negativity, which we might conceive of loosely as the riddle of how difference can emerge within a monistic system, will remain with him throughout his career. Here is Schelling's non-answer:

The I posits a not-I in opposition to the I, and for this one cannot give any ulterior reason, just as one can give none for the I positing itself absolutely; in fact, the one immediately implies the other. The positing of the I is the placing in absolute opposition, that is, the negation, of what is not-I. But originally nothing at all can be put in opposition unless something antecedent is absolutely posited; much less can there be any absolute opposition without an antecedent positing. Yet opposition occurs.<sup>12</sup>

This inability to explain the origins of negation will later become an explicit point of criticism of his thinking. According to Klaus Ottmann, Carl August Eschenmayer, Schelling's friend and "most diligent and constructive critic," in his 1803 *Philosophy and Its Transition to Nonphilosophy* criticized Schelling precisely on this point of "how the Absolute in Schelling's system can come out of itself and become difference."<sup>13</sup>

However, Schelling's response, found in his much overlooked 1804 treatise *Philosophy and Religion*, appears to be less a systematic breakthrough (Schelling by now well into his post-Fichtean *Identitätssystem*) than it is an evasion no different from the one offered in 1795, only now cloaked in the loaded language of the fall or the falling-away (*Abfall*).<sup>14</sup> No doubt intended to cater to the sensibilities of Eschenmayer and his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 90; *SW*, I, 189.

<sup>13</sup> Klaus Ottmann, "Translator's Introduction," in *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), trans., Klaus Ottmann, (Putnam: Spring Publications, Inc., 2010), X, XII.

<sup>14</sup> Here I read this position differently from Ottmann, who sees this as a new theory. See Ibid., X.

He will go on to state that Schelling's theory here also redefines his *Naturphilosophie* "in terms of a Philosophy of History" where God as the Absolute is revealed in the course of history. Ibid., XIII.

Philosophy of Faith contemporaries, Schelling writes: “In a word, there is no continuous transition from the Absolute to the actual; the origin of the phenomenal world is conceivable only as a complete falling-away from absoluteness by means of a leap [*Sprung*].”<sup>15</sup> The use of the word “leap” here is possibly a reference to Jacobi’s *salto mortale*. This infamous motto captures Jacobi’s irrationalist defense of (a leap of) faith in the face of the alleged inability of philosophical reason to systematically secure the existence of freedom, which I mentioned above in relation to Fichte.<sup>16</sup> In an inversion of Jacobi’s leap, Schelling envisions the “extra-essential” fall, a leap into finitude as a negation of the absolute as infinite, as made possible by freedom, rather than Jacobi’s leap of faith making freedom possible.<sup>17</sup>

Difficulties summarizing his notion of the fall and the appearance of negation are exacerbated by Schelling’s own kettle logic-like<sup>18</sup> explanations that amount to, essentially, no explanation, no reason at all.<sup>19</sup> However, the text remains important least of all because Schelling begins to lean much more into the language of negativity, though

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However, this position is already present in 1800’s *System*: “History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute.” Schelling, *System*, 211; *SW*, III, 603 – 604.

<sup>15</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion*, 26; *SW*, VI, 38.

<sup>16</sup> See Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, “Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza” (1785, 1789), in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans., George di Giovanni, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 173 – 252; 339 – 378.

For a critical discussion of Jacobi, see di Giovanni’s introduction in the same volume.

<sup>17</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion*, 28 – 29; *SW*, VI, 39 – 42.

<sup>18</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder*, (London: Verso, 2007), 54.

<sup>19</sup> There is, perhaps, a positive, albeit revisionist, manner to read this *lack of reason*, which Schelling professes explicitly in his earlier works. Here we may consider Schelling’s later advocacy for a so-called non-ground.

this increase in emphasis is accompanied by an unsatisfactory analysis.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, as will become clearer in the course of this discussion, Schelling maintains his basic picture about the processual-oppositional nature between the subject (spoken of here as ideal) and object (as real):

The soul, becoming aware of its falling-away, nonetheless strives to become another absolute and thus to produce absoluteness. But its predicament is that it can only produce that which was (as *idea*) *ideal* within it, as *real* — that is, as negation of the ideal. The soul therefore produces particular and finite things.<sup>21</sup>

The underlying picture is that negativity confines our reflections on reality, cursing us to view and describe the world as well as subjectivity reductively as but particularized instances.

In order to begin drawing out the details of this, I will now turn to an analysis of just what negativity is by highlighting three important points regarding what the notion primarily as it appears Schelling's *System*. After, I will discuss a better way to understand negativity in relation to the innovation of the concept/object distinction in Fregean logic.

First, as stated above, negativity describes a relation between opposites. This oppositional relation can be seen in the manner Schelling introduces his basic distinction between subjectivity and objectivity:

The intrinsic notion of everything merely *objective* in our knowledge, we may speak of as *nature*. The notion of everything *subjective* is called, on the contrary, the *self*, or the *intelligence*. The two concepts are mutually opposed. The intelligence is initially conceived of as the purely presentative, nature purely as what can be presented; the one as the conscious, the other as the nonconscious. But now in every *knowing* a reciprocal concurrence of the two (the conscious and

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<sup>20</sup> This emphasis on notions of opposition, negation, and difference eventually culminates in 1809's *Freiheitsschrift*, of which *Philosophy and Religion* is considered a precursor.

<sup>21</sup> Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion*, 32; *SW*, VI, 44.

the intrinsically nonconscious) is necessary; the problem is to explain this concurrence.<sup>22</sup>

While negativity does not feature explicitly in this quote, the idea is that the basic relationship between a knowing subject and an object of knowledge is marked by an oppositional complex that can be broadly described in terms of what one part, subjectivity, is *not* with respect to the other part, objectivity. Schelling is clearer about the negative character of this opposition later when speaking of the activities of the subjective and objective: “The two activities cannot be related to each other, nor merge in a common product, without being mutually restricted each by the other. For the ideal activity not only denies (or is privative) of the other, but is its real opposite or negation.”<sup>23</sup> Schelling speaks of subjectivity variously as an infinite, unlimited, unrestricted, indeterminate, universal, ideal activity and objectivity as a finite, limited, restricted, determinate, particular, real activity or otherwise simply passivity.<sup>24</sup>

In what follows, I will primarily reference the subject/object distinction as Schelling’s key dichotomy. However, sometimes real and ideal and other related distinctions will be referenced for ease of interpreting Schelling’s own language when cited. Schelling himself is not very clear about the finer differences between all the

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<sup>22</sup> Schelling, *System*, 5; *SW*, III, 340 – 341.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 52; *SW*, III, 400 – 401.

<sup>24</sup> Compare 1797’s *Ideas*: “In the mind, therefore, there is a union of activity and passivity, an originally free and, to that extent, unlimited activity outwards, and another activity extorted from (reflected by) the mind *upon itself*. The latter can be regarded as the *restriction* of the former. But ever restriction can be thought of only as the *negation* of a *positive*. Hence, the former activity is *positive* in nature, the latter *negative*. The former is vented quite *indeterminately*, and to that extent tends towards the *infinite*, while the latter supplies *goal, limits and determinacy* to the former, and to that extent necessarily tends to a *finite*.” Schelling, *Ideas*, 176; *SW*, II, 220.

distinctions he deploys and he tends to conflate them.<sup>25</sup> Regardless, from this it should also be clear that what constitutes a pair of opposites is maximally general and should be seen as a form of abstraction. That is, it is a means to discuss reality at a higher level while overlooking lower-level details for explanatory expedience.

It is worth noting that Schelling's use of the words 'object' and 'objective' can be somewhat unconventional, perhaps inconsistent. Objectivity is often used not to describe something physically outside of or external to the subject, but broadly as the state of anything simply distinct from or opposed to the subject. Importantly, Schelling will speak of objects of thought or knowledge. This becomes particularly confusing when Schelling engages in his principal analysis of self-consciousness whereby the subject as self becomes an object to itself. Other times, however, the notion of objectivity will play a specific epistemic role, one that is arrived at by understanding reality in a certain way—the correct way. In his 1801 essay "On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems," Schelling explains the term as follows:

Through the gradual but *complete* becoming objective of the pure subject-object, the (intuiting) activity, which in *principle* is limitlessly ideal, raises itself to the I, i.e. to the subject for which that subject-object (that ideal-real) is itself object. . . . For them [other philosophical writers], 'objective' signifies the same as '*real*'. – For me, as they could have seen from the System of Idealism, the objective is itself *simultaneously the real and the ideal*; the two are never separate, but exist together originally (even in nature). This ideal-real becomes objective only

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<sup>25</sup> Keeping these notions distinct and collecting all the terms Schelling associates with these oppositional concepts is difficult in that Schelling partakes in a fair amount of, in the words of Michael Vater, terminological slippage. Schelling slides between articulating conceptually distinct moments of the processual opposition of subjectivity and objectivity, and offering glancing, informal summaries of this process that for better or worse fail to keep each moment separate. In the latter expositions, terms at play are often combined in ways that appear to speak against sharp distinctions.

through the emerging consciousness in which the subjective raises itself to the highest (theoretical) potency.<sup>26</sup>

Objectivity, Schelling suggests, is an epistemic state that depends on postulating the identity between subject and object in all things. It is a state arrived at by abstracting away from one's own knowing subjectivity, i.e., does not treat objects of knowledge as wholly dependent on the workings of the transcendental subject, and to see the world's conceptual content as imminent to it. Unless otherwise specified, I will use the term objectivity in its less technical sense.

Second, negativity should not be conflated with the standard logical operator of negation despite Schelling's usage of 'negation,' 'not,' 'non-,' etc.<sup>27</sup> This is a somewhat difficult point to make, but one that I think is critical. While the language of mutual opposition seems to traffic in logical negation, Schelling's conception of negativity does not function in the same way. For one, double negation in the ordinary logical sense will not yield the same result as the act of double negation in Schellingian negativity. This is because the latter notion does not cancel out operators (negation elimination) as is the case in the former notion. As I will discuss later, Schelling's issue is that when subjectivity tries to think itself as subjectivity, all that results is the subject becoming an object, i.e., what stands opposed to the former. And a repetition of this procedure still does not lead to subjectivity as such. Thus, negation elimination does not result. Schelling will describe this outcome the constant objectifying of subjectivity.

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<sup>26</sup> Schelling, "On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems" (1801), in *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, trans., Judith Kahl and Daniel Whistler, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 50 – 51; *SW*, IV, 86 – 87.

<sup>27</sup> This is the same with Hegelian negation as well. As Henrich points out: "The way in which Hegel would use negation bears only remote resemblance to its role in truth-functional logic." Henrich, *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, 317.

In other words, negativity always remains asymmetric in its application. When an opposition as a whole is negated, this simply gives rise to a new opposition. As we will see below, this feature is particularly relevant when it comes to reflexive applications of negativity (e.g., the subject thinking itself) and indicates a very important result about the nature—the rules—of Schelling’s system. What is more, this oppositional complex is present *throughout* nature as well as the subject’s confrontation with the former. It is not just that negation crops up here and there. As a result, heterodox forms of logic that treat negation differently do not suffice in capturing Schelling’s meaning.

Lastly, negativity has a unifying aspect in its application. This can be seen in two ways. On the one hand, Schelling sees the basic opposition between subject and object as reciprocal. Subjectivity is not what it is without objectivity. The two must in some manner coexist, hence the unitive element. On the other hand, an opposition can be subsumed into one half of a new opposition, thereby undermining the former opposition by making it only one part of a new opposition, which creates now a new reciprocal unity—this, of course, is reminiscent of none other than the behavior of Hegel’s *Aufhebung*.<sup>28</sup> However, this is not to say that the prior opposition wholly disappears. It always possesses the possibility of being viewed again, decomposed back into the original opposition.

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<sup>28</sup> At this level of generality the resemblance between Schelling’s method and Hegel’s own is difficult not to reference. However, Schelling’s dialectics is fairly impoverished. For an overview of Hegel’s own approach, see Michael Forster, “Hegel’s dialectical method,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 130 – 170.

### **III. Interlude: A Brief Discussion on Frege's Notions of Concept and Object and the Concept Horse Problem**

All this should suggest that perhaps there may be a better way of speaking about the negativity between subject and object, ideal and real, etc., in this technical sense without primarily construing it in the misleading terms of 'negation,' 'the negative,' 'not,' and the like. My assertion here is that while Schellingian negativity should not be understood as any form of logical negation, the tension between subject and object, which negativity captures, does find an interesting analogy in some other logical ideas. What I have in mind is the more modern Fregean distinction between concept and object.

I want to say that the difference between concept and object is, broadly speaking, one not only marked by something like Schellingian negativity, but also one marked by a shared fundamental problem. For Frege, a problem is generated when analyzing the difference between concepts and objects and attempting to analyze concepts as concepts. The problem that results is commonly referred to as the concept horse problem.<sup>29</sup> As I will suggest here and show in further detail in the next section, Schelling runs into an analogous problem when analyzing the difference between subject and object and trying to analyze subjectivity as subjectivity. Nonetheless, there are some qualifications to this analogy between Frege and Schelling's respective ideas, which I will also touch on in this section.

Let us briefly consider Frege's concept/object distinction. To begin with, as I will also discuss below, it should be noted that like Schelling's notion of negativity, Frege will express difficulty when it comes to straightforwardly defining his own distinction.

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<sup>29</sup> Special thanks for Kelly Becker and Paul Livingston for this suggestion. Any flaws in interpretation are my own.



Perhaps the best way to start is to look to the broader notion of a function, under which concepts fall for Frege. According to Frege, a function is an incomplete or unsaturated expression, which becomes complete or saturated when it is supplemented by an object, also known as an argument, for its expression.<sup>30</sup> For instance, consider the unsaturated mathematical function where the variable 'x' is a placeholder for an argument:  $2x + 1$ . If 'x' is '1,' the function becomes saturated or complete and thus the expression becomes:  $2*1 + 1$ . Once saturated, this function also has a value which can be calculated, namely the number '3.'

However, Frege does not confine his notion of functions and their objects to mathematical equations. Statements or linguistic forms of equations can also be functions.<sup>31</sup> In this case, an unsaturated linguistic function might be: "x are four-legged animals." This function becomes saturated, for example, if 'x' becomes 'Horses:' "Horses are four-legged animals." An interesting result of this saturated function is that it returns, instead of a numeric value, a truth-value, namely 'true.' Such functions, in so far as they only return truth-values, Frege calls concepts.<sup>32</sup> Concepts, Frege will suggest, are grammatically predicative.<sup>33</sup> So in the above example, being a four-legged animal is a concept, which can be saturated by various objects but on its own is not enough to constitute a complete thought. Importantly, Frege will offer a criterion to be able to pick

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<sup>30</sup> Gottlob Frege, "Function and concept," in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logics, and Philosophy*, ed., Brian McGuinness, trans., Peter Geach, (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1984), 140 – 141.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 – 147.

<sup>33</sup> Gottlob Frege, "On Concept and Object," in *Collected Papers on Mathematics, Logics, and Philosophy*, ed., Brian McGuinness, trans., Peter Geach, (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1984), 183.

out his distinction linguistically: “the singular definite article always indicates an object, whereas the indefinite article accompanies a concept-word.”<sup>34</sup>

This is where Frege’s distinction runs into a puzzle and where we begin to also see the workings of Schellingian negativity. Suppose we wish to functionally consider not the object ‘Horses,’ but the concept of horses in general, i.e., ‘The concept horse.’ If, for example, we let ‘The concept horse’ be ‘x’ in the above function, we receive ‘false’ as its value. This is because concepts themselves do not have legs and are not animals. But what is striking is that we are not dealing with a concept at all when ‘The concept horse’ is under discussion. For, according to Frege’s above criterion, ‘The concept horse’ must be an object in that it takes on the singular definite article.

In other words, by Frege’s own lights, if one wishes to discuss concepts themselves, they can become objects. Consider the unsaturated function: ‘x is a concept.’ If ‘The concept horse’ becomes the object for this function, the value of the function is ‘false.’ In other words, we are forced to conclude—seemingly paradoxically—that: ‘The concept horse is not a concept.’ This is commonly referred to as the concept horse problem. Frege himself admits this expression is a “departure from custom” in that similar statements do not have this issue. For example, ‘the city of Berlin is a city’ or ‘the volcano Vesuvius is a volcano’ both remain true. But something odd happens when considering concepts themselves.

In “On Concept and Object,” Frege confesses that when attempting to discuss his distinction, when he tries to speak of a concept, he ends up making reference to an object: “I admit that there is quite a peculiar obstacle in the way of an understanding with the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 184.

reader. By a kind of necessity of language, my expressions, taken literally, sometimes miss my thought; I mention an object, when what I intend is a concept.”<sup>35</sup>

Schelling, as I will show later, runs into the same issue when trying to discuss subjectivity as subjectivity rather than concepts as concepts. Because subject and object are for Schelling marked by negativity, when the subject wishes to consider its own subjectivity, it becomes an object to itself. Thus, Schelling is forced to say something like: ‘The subject that intuited such-and-such is not a subject.’ In other words, the problem Schelling identifies is that each time he tries to think subjectivity as such, he ends up objectifying it. However, I will set aside this comparison until the next section as it will take some time to demonstrate just how Schelling runs into this concept horse-type problem.

Now, I believe this shared problem is ran into by both thinkers because both the concept/object as well as the subject/object distinction share two important traits. Both distinctions are said to be oppositional, and both are said to be fundamental. The two combined, I think, uniquely mark out negativity. By oppositional, I mean here that one notion is defined on the basis of what it is not in relation to another notion. There are of course oppositions, e.g., the logical negation of a particular expression, that are not fundamental. By fundamental, I mean anything basic to a system. An arbitrary expression that just so happens to be negated is thus not a good candidate to capture negativity. The opposition captured by negativity is something essential to certain categories or terms, e.g., concept/object, subject/object.

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<sup>35</sup> Frege, “On Concept and Object,” 193.

Regarding the oppositional nature of Frege's distinction, Frege writes in "Function and Concept:" "An object is anything that is not a function, so that an expression for it does not contain an empty place."<sup>36</sup> As for Schelling, as I discussed above, the various oppositions between subject and object, ideal and real, and so on, are also marked by what each is respectively not in relation to its counterpart.

As for the fundamental nature of Frege's distinction, Frege states in "Function and Object" that "functions are fundamentally different from objects."<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Frege attributes the struggle to define objects to their simple nature. Frege writes that "the question arises what it is that we are here calling an object." He goes on to admit: "I regard a regular definition as impossible, since we have here something too simple to admit of logical analysis. It is only possible to indicate what is meant."<sup>38</sup> Such language is reminiscent of Schelling's struggle discussed above to define negativity.

Nevertheless, I must emphasize that this is a loose analogy. I say this because there are many critical differences between the workings of Schelling's notions of subjectivity and objectivity, and Frege's concept/object distinction. I will only indicate some differences briefly here so that the analogy is not taken too far and confused with Schelling's language in the discussion that follows.

First of all, Schelling of course is not discussing formal logical or mathematics, but transcendental subjectivity (and in the philosophy of identity period a modified

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<sup>36</sup> Frege, "Function and Concept," 147.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 147.

version of the transcendental subject).<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Schelling is fascinated by the formal systems of his time, particularly Euclidean geometry. And, as I will discuss later, Schelling in fact wishes to appropriate geometry's notion of postulation (in addition to sometimes mimicking a pseudo-geometrical method). However, at the end of the day, for him the workings of subjectivity, objectivity, negativity, and the like are matters of epistemology and fundamental ontology.

This is very different from the way Frege is conceiving of his distinction. Frege clearly states that the obstacles he runs into regarding concept and object are an issue "founded on the nature of our language."<sup>40</sup> Schelling in contrast indicates that the obstacles he encounters are endemic to the nature of reality. Still, Frege's problem is one that concerns the inexpressibility of category distinctions, only for him it is one of logic.<sup>41</sup> The same could be said of Schelling, though logic in the Fregean sense is not what Schelling is after as the latter's analysis is not concerned with analyzing truth-values *per se*, but the transcendental conditions of subjectivity. However, while both have different aims, it is worth noting that neither of the two thinkers are concerned with psychological concepts. An analysis of transcendental subjectivity for Kant and the post-Kantian German idealists is resolutely not an issue of the psychological. As for Frege, he grants

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<sup>39</sup> In my final chapter, I briefly explore how Schelling preserves part of transcendental subjectivity in his philosophy of identity period.

<sup>40</sup> Frege, "On Concept and Object," 194.

<sup>41</sup> This is how Proops puts it. See Ian Proops, "What is Frege's 'concept horse problem'?", in *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: History and Interpretation*, eds., Peter Sullivan and Michael Potter, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76.

there are psychological notions of concepts, but makes clear this is not at all what he seeks to analyze.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, there is a critical technical difference between the two thinkers' respective distinctions. In Frege's logic, there are actually two different types of concepts: first-order concepts and second-order concepts, also referred to as first- and second-level concepts.<sup>43</sup> The former can fall under the latter, and this relation is similar to but different from a first-level concept's relation to an object.<sup>44</sup> What this looks like and why it is important for Frege is not relevant here, but it is worth noting because Schelling does not have such a distinction. Nonetheless, Schelling will also speak of concepts of concepts as well as higher levels of analysis concerning concepts. This arises primarily when discussing subjectivity's analysis of its own activities.

But despite the overlap in terminology, Schelling's language should not be conflated with Frege's second-level concepts. Higher levels, also referred to as potencies or powers for Schelling, arise when, for instance, the subject analyzes itself or even goes on to analyze itself having analyzed itself. Assuming for a moment that Schellingian subjectivity is something like a function that takes objects, where objects here both denote Fregean objects but also Schellingian objects, Schelling will make clear that subjectivity, when analyzing itself, also becomes an object. This is where Schelling's version of the concept horse problem will arise. Here also, the problem gets tied in with

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<sup>42</sup> Frege, "On Concept and Object," 182.

<sup>43</sup> See Ibid., 188 – 191; Frege, "Function and Concept," 153 – 156; Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans., J.L. Austin, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), §53, 64 – 65.

<sup>44</sup> Frege, "On Concept and Object," 190.

Schelling's language of levels and concepts of concepts, but in relation to Fregean jargon strictly speaking, levels are not involved nor are concepts of concepts.

With this comparison now made, I will return to a discussion of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. I will show how in the course of Schelling's analysis of subjectivity, subjectivity itself continuously drops out and becomes for Schelling objective. This problematic, which Schelling himself points out, forces him into the concept horse problem. How he attempts to resolve the problem, however, will turn out to itself be problematic.

#### **IV. The Vanishing Act of Subjectivity: More on Negativity, Further Comparisons to Frege's Concept/Object, and Intellectual Illusions**

Schelling opens his discussion in his *System* by taking up transcendental subjectivity as the founding principle of his framework. However, in doing so, that is, in claiming that the conditions of possible knowledge are found within the subject, Schelling adopts the standard assumption discussed at the beginning of this chapter, namely that objectivity problematically becomes merely derivative of the subject. Furthermore, he affirms that the opposite occurs if one's grounding principle is a matter of objectivity instead. The problem then becomes how to affirm the independence and legitimacy of the other notion: "*Either the objective is made primary, and the question is: how a subjective is annexed thereto, which coincides with it? . . . Alternatively, the subjective is made primary, and the problem is: how an objective supervenes, which coincides with it?*"<sup>45</sup>

However, early into the text, what one finds is that in fact the opposite problem is at issue. This is to say that in beginning with the premise of transcendental subjectivity,

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<sup>45</sup> Schelling, *System*, 5 – 6; *SW*, III, 340 – 341.

Schelling's problem actually becomes how to capture subjectivity as subjectivity as well as all its related capacities of thinking, knowing, acting, intuiting, etc., in themselves. As noted above, Schelling associates subjectivity with notions like ideality, infinitude, unlimitedness, universality, etc., and so the stakes concern these capacities too. What Schelling finds is that all these concepts become subsumed under the opposite notions of objectivity each time they are surveyed or observed. On reflection, all activity of the subject appears only as its opposite: objective, particular, passive, and so on. Thus, in beginning with transcendental subjectivity, all the predicates he would like to attribute to the transcendental subject turn out to instead be lost to notions that would fall under the heading of objectivity, not the other way around as was assumed. This transcendental irony, this seeming impossibility to locate the attributes the subject attributes to itself, will turn out to be the workings of negativity.

To tease out the general mechanics of this, Schelling undertakes a circuitous analysis that dominates the earlier parts of his text. This circuitousness amounts to an investigation of the behavior of subjectivity trying to think itself, something which in this stage is not yet recognized. Nearing the end of the text Schelling will summarize this yet-to-be recognized process as an "odyssey of the spirit, which, marvelously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself."<sup>46</sup>

In the Introduction to his *System*, Schelling raises an important distinction between the 'ordinary' mode of cognition and its 'transcendental' version. In the former mode, one forgoes knowledge of the activities of subjectivity itself and only cognizes

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 232; *SW*, III, 628 – 629.



objectivity: “In ordinary action, the *acting itself* is lost sight of in the object of action.”<sup>47</sup> For instance, in ordinary intuiting (in the Kantian sense) a subject is not necessarily aware of one’s intuiting, but merely intuits or actively experiences the world. In contrast, the “transcendental mode of apprehension merely glimpses the intuited through the act of intuiting.”<sup>48</sup> The transcendental mode of apprehension is a form of meta-cognition where one reflects on the prior act of the subject, e.g., intuiting, instead.

It is here where I can openly draw comparisons between Frege’s concept/object distinction and Schelling’s own thinking. In Schelling’s investigation, the ordinary mode of cognition I wish to liken to something like standard saturated concepts, and the transcendental mode as none other than the attempt of concepts to discuss concepts. This latter statement should be qualified because Schelling does not run into the concept horse problem immediately but will in turn analyze what was found in the transcendental mode itself (referring to this also as the transcendental mode).

We might thus summarize the ordinary mode of cognition as actions of the subject, while the transcendental mode concerns thoughts about the subject’s actions, and even thoughts about thoughts about thoughts, and so forth. He will describe this process as an ongoing ascent to higher levels: “Transcendental philosophy is nothing else but a constant raising of the self to a higher power; its whole method consists in leading the self from one level of self-intuition to another.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9; *SW*, III, 343 – 344.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 90; *SW*, III, 451 – 452.

As a brief aside, this idea will later be articulated as a generalized hierarchy called powers (*Potenzen*), sometimes translated as potencies, and will become a mainstay of Schelling's own obtuse formalism beginning in 1801. This idea will be expanded upon in 1804's "System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular" (also referred to as the Würzburg lectures) with the use of exponents to signify different levels in his hierarchy. He will maintain this mode of signification well into the end of his career.<sup>50</sup>

This notion of powers later becomes formalized as exponents, e.g.,  $A^1$ ,  $A^2$ ,  $A^3$ .

For instance, in 1804's Würzburg lectures, Schelling writes:

the higher power, comprehending the subordinate one, will necessarily also express a higher degree of reality or of position. For example,  $A^1$ , which is merely an affirmation of the affirmed and which refers to the mere state of being affirmed, is necessarily a lesser *position* than  $A^2$ , which also comprehends the very principle that affirms in  $A^2$ .<sup>51</sup>

$A^2$  acts as the transcendental level of the subject whereas  $A^1$  is the ordinary level.<sup>52</sup>

Schelling will also suggest that different physical interactions within nature can be

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<sup>50</sup> For an excellent overview of Schelling's notion of potency as well as the origin and history of the idea, see Benjamin Berger and Daniel Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 94 – 116.

<sup>51</sup> Schelling, "System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular," 193; *SW*, VI, 213 – 214.

<sup>52</sup> In Berger and Whistler's *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, the argument is made that Schelling's notion of powers/potencies does not involve negativity:

Nor does Schelling understand this development to be motivated by an immanent process of self-negating negativity, where one logical form immanently *negates* itself and thereby generates a new form, one which is qualitatively distinct from the first. As we saw above, Schelling conceives the development from  $A$  to  $A^2$  to proceed by way of the *duplication* of  $A$  with itself. The novel form that is generated in this atemporal process, then, is not something which is a '*not-A*' but an *intensified* ' $A$ '.

However, this reading of potency as duplication is compatible with my account of negativity. When, for instance, the subject intuits its intuiting, this act (1) doubles the act of intuiting, and (2) in the broadest sense of negativity turns its own subjectivity into an object, i.e., a not-subject. Furthermore, it's unclear why "intensified  $A$ " would not be "not- $A$ ", for if " $A$ " played the same role as "intensified  $A$ " there would

formalized in relation to this schema. He will also indicate the manner in which subjectivity emerges from nature's interactions, but this discussion I will set aside.

One last thing to note about this evolution of Schelling's conception is that he will not organize his schema as an unending series of new levels. Instead, he will claim that only three levels are necessary for capturing the generalized workings of the world (relative to each domain of nature and subjectivity). In 1804 he writes: "*The triplicity of the powers is the necessary mode of appearance of the real and ideal universe, each for itself.*"<sup>53</sup> However, there is a cryptic moment in 1810's "Stuttgart Seminars" where Schelling breaks with this, indicating that nature's own developmental hierarchy (in contrast to the subject's) can be ordered in a longer chain of levels when it moves beyond strictly natural interactions:

everything is complete once the third power has been reached. Hence it is found *above* and *outside* of nature. If we were to continue the sequence of the powers, we might designate it as  $A^4$ , there being already an  $A^3$  in nature; however, all this means is that, with respect to all of nature, it is  $A^2$ .<sup>54</sup>

Thus, we might see this limitation of three powers as really only a simplified framework used in relation to the subject matter at hand, and not a strict prohibition to formalize an analysis of the subject and the world necessarily into triplets. After all, one can analyze one's thoughts about thoughts indefinitely. His suggestion, then, is that we gain new insights regarding the nature of thinking about thinking only up to a certain point. Oddly

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be need for the adjective. I take it the intention of the authors is to suggest that this duplication process does not necessarily involve logical negation, with which I agree. See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 116.

<sup>53</sup> Schelling, "System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular," 191; *SW*, VI, 211.

<sup>54</sup> Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 222; *SW*, VII, 455.

enough, this ascent to higher levels will, he claims, manifest not only within particular natural interactions, not only within individual thinking subjectivity, but also in ‘epochs’ of the world’s collective historical and natural development.<sup>55</sup>

Returning to my comparison, I want to repeat that functions that take objects are akin to the actions of a subject.<sup>56</sup> For example, a subject can intuit, know, etc., an object, with the former terms acting as functions. In fact, this functional relation can also return truth-values and hence can be deemed conceptual in the Fregean sense. We can say things like: ‘Berlin is known by Jones,’ or ‘The tree is being intuited by Jones.’ Thus, a function can be seen as the negative of its object. Moreover, such a function, e.g., intuiting, depends on its object, e.g., the intuited.

To push the analogy further, we might say that the functioning of subjectivity in its ordinary mode does not necessarily involve any self-awareness (“the *acting itself* is lost sight of”). Like a function that cannot take a function as function as an argument, as a rule “the self,” Schelling writes in his *System*, “cannot simultaneously intuit and intuit itself as intuiting, and so cannot intuit itself as limiting either.”<sup>57</sup> The subject’s actions as functions are, in the ordinary mode, not actively reflected on.<sup>58</sup>

However, at the transcendental level, the very same function of intuiting can, according to Schelling, take as an object the subject’s prior act of the intuiting in the

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<sup>55</sup> For an example, see *Ibid.*, 220; *SW*, VII, 452.

<sup>56</sup> Again, Schelling will also say the natural world works this way as well. To cut a long story short, the hierarchy in nature will move from the dynamic interactions of inanimate or ‘slumbering’ matter to animate organisms, eventually transitioning to awakened full-blown minded or conscious subjectivity.

<sup>57</sup> Schelling, *System*, 54; *SW*, III, 403-4.

<sup>58</sup> Despite Schelling’s assertion, one might wonder if this is the case. For instance, with performative utterances, e.g., “I bet you \$100 Schelling is wrong,” the case could be made that one in fact is simultaneously acting and aware of one’s action.

ordinary mode, thereby attaining what he calls an intuition of intuition. To bring in the language of negativity once more, now the total act is ‘negated’ into a new object for a new function. And once again, at the transcendental level, the function of intuition or whatever function is of concern, is not (and cannot be) factored into awareness.

Nonetheless, an attribute of this transcendental mode is that one can gain an extracted insight that is not found in the ordinary mode. That is, we gain insight into very action with which the subject itself was engaged. And so, we might say the transcendental mode allows for an act of reflection.

As touched on above, Schelling envisions this ability as not limited to intuition, but to the gamut of actions the subject (and nature) is capable of. This gives the transcendental philosopher room to observe subjectivity from the top down, to see with regularity and abstraction the possibilities of the subject. Whereas ordinary cognition is a matter of knowing or intuiting in itself, that is, in the moment and without reflexive self-awareness, transcendental cognition is a knowing of a knowing, an intuiting of an intuiting, and the like. The privilege of the latter is thus in its ability to delimit the very field of action of the subject where ordinary consciousness fails to do so. “—Again, ordinary thinking is a mechanism governed by concepts,” Schelling summarizes, “though they are not distinguished *as* concepts; whereas transcendental thinking suspends this mechanism, and in becoming aware of the concept as an act, attains to the *concept of a concept*.”<sup>59</sup>

This feature of transcendental subjectivity is at once its ostensible bug. Again, just as with Frege’s concept/object, the negative gaze of transcendental subjectivity captures

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 9; *SW*, III, 344 – 345.

things as a different type, i.e., as objectivity, but never itself as subjectivity, i.e., as the very function doing the activity of intuiting during the action, i.e., in itself. In seeking itself through this action of reflection, subjectivity becomes objective and therefore not-subjective—just as a function’s object is not itself a function. Here we find the standard oppositional/negative dimension again. As Schelling comes to learn, with each further transcendental observation, subjectivity and its related actions in themselves remain lost, and no negation of objectivity itself seems to return to subjectivity or the function’s activity in itself.

Accordingly, all notions of subjectivity in themselves are by definition nonobjective, and the notion of the ‘in itself’ continuously fails to be captured. The idea is that amongst the class of potential inferences or judgments one can make, within the subset of reflexive judgments, the properties of subjectivity and its activities drop out as a rule. As Schelling puts it:

The nature of the transcendental mode of apprehension must therefore consist essentially in this, *that even that which in all other thinking, knowing, or acting escapes consciousness and is absolutely nonobjective, is therein brought to consciousness and becomes objective; it consists, in short, of a constant objectifying-to-itself of the subjective.*<sup>60</sup>

Herein lies Schelling’s own concept horse problem. Schelling wishes to think subjectivity as such. But in doing so, he claims the thinking itself becomes objective, hence not subjective. To rephrase the problem using Schelling’s language of subjectivity as nonobjective, he would be forced to say something like: ‘The nonobjective is objective.’

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

As noted earlier, Schelling will periodically point out areas where other (erroneous) philosophical systems and perspectives emerge and this elusive character of subjectivity features as a central mechanism of this.<sup>61</sup> This one-sided, constant objectifying outcome of subjectivity, Schelling later explains, is precisely the illusion to which the dogmatist *qua* Spinozist succumbs:

Here for the first time we may perceive very clearly the difference between the philosopher's standpoint and that of his object. We, who philosophize, know that the limitation of the objective has its sole ground in the intuitant or subjective. The *intuiting self* as such does not and cannot know this, as now becomes clear. . . . It is therefore necessary that the intuitant, which seeks only itself in the objective, should find the negative element therein to be something not posited by itself. If the philosopher likewise maintains this to be the case (as in dogmatism), this is because he continually coalesces with his object and shares with it the same point of view. . . . That the self finds its limitation to be something not of its own positing, amounts to saying that the self finds it posited by something opposed to itself, namely, *the not-self*.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, the dogmatist mistakes this “*constant objectifying-to-itself of the subjective*” as the truth of subjectivity, which reduces the notion of the self to nothing but an object and its relations to other objects of the same family.<sup>63</sup> In other words, dogmatist fails to account for the role of subjectivity's own alienation.<sup>64</sup>

While this position attempts to explain away a Spinozistic kind of materialism, the conception rendered in its place, that of an active subjectivity continuously lost sight

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<sup>61</sup> There are several more of these moments, some more elaborate and illustrative than others, in his 1800 text that deserve study. However, for the purposes of my exposition I leave this as a general example of the workings of his system.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 54; *SW*, III, 403 – 404.

<sup>63</sup> Ten years later in his “Stuttgart Seminars,” Schelling will criticize the French materialism of Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d’Holbach (J.B. Mirabaud) on similar grounds, calling his work “the most debased.” See Schelling, “Stuttgart Seminars,” 215; *SW*, VII, 444 – 445.

<sup>64</sup> Alienation actually happens to be the term used by Fichte to capture this process. See Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, 154.

of, can suggest a fairly extreme subjectivist point of view. After all, Schelling clearly states: “the limitation of the objective has its sole ground in the intuitant or subjective.” On this account, all objectivity seems to be originally the result of subjectivity, which is idealism *par excellence*. All that reduces to objectivity seems to do so, on Schelling’s account so far, only on the basis of the functioning of subjectivity itself. That which appears as independent of subjectivity comes about only in hindsight, after a subject’s grasp, which can just as well misinform our conception of reality.

While this problem cannot be dealt with here, what can be pointed out is the standard transcendental thesis that what must delimit the objective world is not itself objective but the conditions for objectivity. Schelling’s innovation is in his suggestion that such an act of delimitation can outrun itself upon further reflection, and that this rhythmic, negative dynamic is a feature of reality itself. While this view in 1800 is a matter of transcendental subjectivity, a more generalized conception of an apparent non-subjective elusive activity of nature in the vein of *natura naturans* which is lost sight of as *natura naturata* was already present in his earlier works in *Naturphilosophie* like 1799’s *First Outline* and becomes his official view in 1801.<sup>65</sup> The activity of our subjectivity then becomes seen as the highest instantiation of this more general active but misleading character of the absolute.

Throughout his career, Schelling will appropriately speak of this tendency toward intellectual illusion as the result of thinking incorrectly about the seeming duality in reality, which I’ve been discussing under the various headings of subjectivity and

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<sup>65</sup> It is only apparent because, again, his *Naturphilosophie* originally was an outgrowth of his earlier Fichtean subjectivism.



objectivity, mind and body, activity and passivity, ideal and real, and so on. In several texts, Schelling appropriately titles this deceptive feature of reality as duplicity (*Duplicität*), evoking the senses we find equally in the term double-dealing. The only way to resist such illusions is to see this duplicity and its processual nature as the character of the whole of reality. Doing so involves supposing the so-called identity between the two sides as the basis of the absolute, and this is what it means for him to begin to understand the world in its identity and objectivity (here in the technical sense). In 1806's "Statement of the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine," Schelling openly discusses this tendency toward illusion and its remedy:

Reason declares itself and knows itself at once and immediately, whole and undivided, and is always the same. Only in incompleteness is progress, and it is not immovable and unchangeable. All the errors of the understanding arise out of a judgment on things in their incompleteness. Show it things in their totality, and it will comprehend and recognize its error. Just as [happens] when considering optical illusions, it finally gives up and accepts [the viewpoint of] reason, so too in the case of the higher, intellectual illusions.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, Schelling's suggestion is that such intellectual illusions result from not viewing reality from a totalizing perspective. This perspective is one that does not see the supposed oppositions in the world as actual but only apparent. This is, of course, his identity thesis. The dualisms between mind and body, subject and object, ideal and real, and so forth, Schelling wants to say, are in fact unified and not separate. For instance, in 1801's "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," in a moment that also neatly

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<sup>66</sup> Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, trans., Dale E. Snow, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018), 39; *SW*, VII, 32.

resonates with Frege's distinction, Schelling asserts that "*In itself* [relative to absolute identity] *no opposition occurs between subject and predicate.*"<sup>67</sup>

Still, Schelling is vague as to what it means exactly to adopt this absolute perspective and to resolve these tensions. For example, I may very well know that from the 'standpoint' of our solar system that our planet revolves around the sun and not *vice versa*. However, it is not that I simply adopt this standpoint. Real intellectual labor went into vindicating the heliocentric model and all of its finer details, e.g., the rates in which the planets move around the sun, the fact that the planets move in ellipses and not circles, etc. Schelling does not offer all these finer details.

Moreover, because the subject, which bears the guilt of intellectual illusions, is on Schelling's account imminent to reality, it seems to me that such illusions run deeper and are not primarily an issue with the intellect. Rather, they are ontological illusions that arise not merely on the basis of miscomprehension, but first and foremost on the basis of the apparent duplicity that permanently subsists at a lower-level of reality, i.e., as reality viewed not from the perspective of an absolute totality. Perhaps this is no different from our knowing that our planet goes around the sun while sometimes speaking about this otherwise. But the difference is that in principle we can very well prove this otherwise empirically. But the analogy does not hold for Schelling because the illusions we are dealing with are endemic to structure reality itself. So, empirical work does nothing for us. Instead, to get his point across, he must lean on reason's alleged special status.

So far, we have not seen how Schelling offers an explanation as to how reason can liberate us from intellectual illusions. His answer will be that reason possesses the

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<sup>67</sup> Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," §22, 355; *SW*, IV, 123.

special insight of intellectual intuition, which I will discuss in what follows. According to Schelling, intellectual intuition offers us a way in which subjectivity in itself, and not simply as an object, can be thought. But it is also here that it must be admitted that my comparison of his notion of negativity and Frege's concept/object distinction reaches an explicit roadblock because Schelling seems to contravene the rules I am attributing to his system when speaking about intellectual intuition. With that said, I want to say that maybe the better insight will be that we cannot wipe our hands clean of such illusions. The trick up reason's sleeve—that of intellectual intuition—fails, but first let us watch Schelling try to show us otherwise.

#### **V. A Magician Reveals His Secrets: Self-Consciousness as the Construction of the Self**

The answer Schelling provides for this difficulty brings us back to his principle of the absolute I (formalized the  $I = I$  or self = self) discussed in the last chapter. The ability to speak of subjectivity as such will result from this foundational principle. Nevertheless, Schelling's articulations of this principle, as well as how he arrives at it in his 1800 text, leave an open question as to how far it actually brings us. Schelling's principle, despite some loaded language and some of his contradictory claims on its behavior, can be read quite minimally, free from much of its troublesome baggage, e.g., talk of the absolute, magic circles, etc.

Schelling's approach to the question of how we can reclaim subjectivity appears to be internal to the trap of negativity. Schelling will, as it were, engineer his founding principle out of a series of reflections on the subject, raising these reflections to higher and higher levels until his result is reached. The outcome turns out to be quite simple, but the interpretation he provides of it is not. The principle of the absolute I will amount to

nothing other than the subject's own seemingly paradoxical act of creation. This act, however, is not as outlandish as it sounds. The basic claim will be that through the reflections on the workings of one's own thinking, what the subject as self adds up to is just that: its own thoughts, its own actions. "The concept of the self arises through the act of self-consciousness, and thus *apart* from this act the self is nothing; its whole reality depends solely on this act, and *it is itself nothing other than this act.*"<sup>68</sup> However, as I will discuss shortly, what this act of self-consciousness will be turns out to give the self, according to Schelling, a privileged ontological status.

While the full repercussions of what it means for the self to create itself cannot be totally developed here, to state the matter quickly, one way to read what is being said (since Schelling will provide conflicting accounts) is that prior to the creation of the self, we witness only the operations of negativity, which yield only objectivity and so by definition are not subjective and thus not the self. But once the system generates the self from the oppositions within thinking, the self is found to be party to the oppositions of the lower levels, and thus such oppositions are then considered to *have been* the subject all along. This insight, which we might speak of grammatically as the *present perfect* aspect of negativity.<sup>69</sup>

According to Schelling, the privileged status of the subject involves the manner in which it emerges and realizes itself as a self. In the earlier discussion of negativity, what

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<sup>68</sup> Schelling, *System*, 25; *SW*, III, 366-7.

<sup>69</sup> What cannot be discussed here is how this present perfect tense may be generalized as rule to become the future perfect also known as the future anterior, whereby things yet to arrive in the odyssey of the spirit within Schelling's absolute can also be understood *to will have been* the case. For a discussion of this notion of the future anterior in relation to Hegel's conception of modality, see Adrian Johnston, *A New German Idealism: Hegel, Žižek, and Dialectical Materialism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 74 – 128.

we found was that, beginning with the ordinary mode of cognition, the subject in a particular act, say, intuiting an object, is not aware of this intuiting. Rather, this is revealed only later insofar as that action is now the object of reflection in the transcendental mode. If this latter reflection is then raised up once again now to a third level, Schelling claims that what can be viewed is not only the prior act of the subject's mere intuiting, but the additional act of the subject's intuiting of that mere intuiting.

And while this last result also becomes but an object of reflection, it possesses a fundamentally different status. Unlike the first act, that of, e.g., sensory intuition, which involves a relation to an object external to and independent of the subject, i.e., an empirical relation, the second act when reflected on involves a relation to an object internal to and dependent on the subject as itself, i.e., a non-empirical object: "The self is indeed an object, but only *for itself*, and is thus not *originally* in the world of objects; it first *becomes* an object by making itself into an object, and does not become one for anything external, but always for itself."<sup>70</sup>

This act is none other than Schelling's controversial notion of intellectual intuition discussed in the prior chapter—the very thing that Schelling claimed allows us to gain access to the so-called magical circle of absolute I. However, as we can now see, this version of intellectual intuition appears far more trivial, for what is revealed is not so much some metaphysical subject or spooky absolute entity but, on Schelling's account, an intuiting of intuiting.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, this act of intellectual intuition still technically

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<sup>70</sup> Schelling, *System*, 26; *SW*, III, 367 – 368.

<sup>71</sup> It should be noted here that Schelling seems to diverge in his usage of the Kantian term of intuition. Strictly speaking, for Kant intuiting concerns sensibility in space and time. But Schelling's notion of an intuiting of intuiting sounds more along the lines of thinking about intuitions and diverges from Kant's usage because it is a matter of non-sensible intuition.

conforms to the spirit of Schelling's own earlier stranger articulations of intellectual intuition in that it is an act of non-sensible intuition minimally construed. This is because the vantage point offered by the third level (i.e., an intuiting of an intuiting of an intuiting) allows us to think non-empirical objects, which therefore meets the requirement of not being a sensory intuition, hence an intellectual one. Put differently, the object of the subject's thought is no longer a matter of the external world. When thinking thought, and thinking about thinking thought, the objects of thought are intellectual objects. And this, Schelling believes, is the mark of intellectual intuition, or at least this mundane version of it.

As it will turn out, old habits die hard and Schelling will load this version with more than its cartridge can carry. Due to the limitations of negativity, the discursivity of reflection can only bring us so far, yet he far further. Intellectual intuition is, he writes, "a knowing whose object is not *independent* thereof, and thus a *knowing that is simultaneously a producing of its object*—an intuition freely productive in itself, in which producer and product are one and the same."<sup>72</sup> As I will discuss next, much of this turns out to be something he cannot technically say given his account of negativity. And like his earlier ideas on intellectual intuition discussed in the last chapter, this version, too, will end up being interpreted by Schelling as the means to get at the full-blown paradoxical absolute I. Without justification, Schelling will suddenly leap into this absolute like, in the critical words of Hegel, "a shot from a pistol."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 27; *SW*, III, 368-9.

<sup>73</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans., Terry Pinkard, (Unpublished, 2013), §27.

## VI. Two Wrongs Make a Postulate: The Failure of Negativity

Turning first to the bigger issues, upon introducing this minimal conception of intellectual intuition, Schelling will claim in passing that this act of self-consciousness is an “eternal, timeless act.”<sup>74</sup> Elsewhere, he will claim that the whole series of reflections that culminate in self-consciousness originally constituted one “extratemporal act.”<sup>75</sup> Self-consciousness, he goes on, amounts to but a time-bound and particular recapitulation and return to this atemporal original act. However, this talk of an absolute I cannot be substantiated by his discussion of self-consciousness above.

Additionally, even if some of his weaker assertions within this already weakened version of intellectual intuition can be mitigated by relegating them to the realm of postulation, which I will discuss shortly, similar to a regulative ideal that we speak of *as if* it were the case. However, these claims about the timeless nature of such an act extend far beyond the realm of ideals and into the domain of hard metaphysical assertions, and strongly dogmatic ones at that. While this problem does not go away (really, it worsens) in Schelling’s work post-1800, he will still stress the importance of the idea of postulating the ground of his system. Here the only thing I believe we can do is say that he simply stands in contradiction with himself, leaning into his better moments as evidence for this.

Moreover, there are some basic issues even with this stripped-down version of intellectual intuition. First, there is the problem regarding how Schelling can speak of a knowing that is simultaneously a producing of an object of knowledge. In other words,

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<sup>74</sup> Schelling, *System*, 32; *SW*, III, 375 – 376.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 48; *SW*, III, 396 – 397.

how can product and producing coincide? The reason this is an issue is the fact that it traffics in the language of activity, which should drop out as a rule in specific, negative acts of reflection—either, exclusively, we are producing or contemplating a product according to what he has said earlier. While there is a case for Schelling’s central claim that this third level reflection on the self essentially involves a non-empirical element that the second level did not, he is still clear that the “self is indeed an object.” But this object-creating activity, I believe, cannot actually be spoken of according to Schelling’s own articulations for it, too, would need to be taken as object.

However, there is a sense in which we can read him as suggesting that this activity can be inferred, and that this inference is sufficient to achieve the result. Since the self’s non-empirical status means it is not dependent on the external world, the self’s existence may be said to come from an activity of the self’s own doing. The question then becomes if such an inference is the correct one. The argument goes that in the very act of asserting this to be the case, it makes it the case. And this privileged status is afforded to the self and the self alone. This would be to follow Fichte: the self posits that it is positing. But even with this qualification in mind, Schelling’s picture may be criticized as a matter of speculatively filling in the blanks of reflection, an act of suturing over an explanatory gap endemic to the negativity of thought. All we find are particular acts, indeed some non-empirical, and an ascent to ever-higher levels of thinking about thinking, but none of this secures the claim that we have some sort of self-producing subject, let alone an absolute one.

There may be a way this shortcoming of Schelling’s explanation can be amended: through Schelling’s notion of postulation. Schelling will take this insight of self-



consciousness and turn it into the postulate of his system. As mentioned above, this will be something like Kant's notion of a regulative ideal, a demand that we ought to make rather than a claim whose truth we may secure. However, Schelling takes this Kantian inflected position and elevates it by way of an inversion, turning it into the basis of his system.<sup>76</sup> The postulation of his principle will not simply be a matter of a demand, but the extra-systematic act that allows a system to truly begin its demonstrations.<sup>77</sup> The postulation of this actively productive self, otherwise lost to negativity, is to ground philosophical thought as such, to be the "substrate to carry and support its thinking . . . which in transcendental thinking replaces the objective world, and sustains, as it were, the speculative flight."<sup>78</sup> Consequently, what we might cautiously describe as an inference drawn from this minimal act of intellectual intuition becomes for Schelling the basic postulate of his philosophical system—something without proof but that enables it. Of course, assuming Schelling is on to something regarding the existence of an active, productive subject, it is one thing to make this claim about *some* acts of subjectivity, and another thing entirely to apply it to the whole of reality.

In a later part of his text, Schelling will analyze this generation of the self in greater detail, and it is here where he will be open about the contradictory status of the

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<sup>76</sup> Beiser points out that Schelling's earlier exposition of the absolute I in 1795's "Of the I" as something constitutive and not a regulative ideal resulted from Schelling's not having read the third part of Fichte's *Grundlage*, which emphasizes this aspect. Here it appears Schelling brings the two together. See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 473.

<sup>77</sup> "Now since a theoretical principle is a *theorem*, while a practical one is a *command*, there must lie something in the middle between the two—and this is the *postulate* which borders on *practical* philosophy, since it is simply a *demand*, and on *theoretical*, since its *demand* is for a *purely theoretical construction*. Where the postulate gets its coercive power from, is at once explained by the fact that it is used for practical demands. Intellectual intuition is something that one can demand and expect; anyone who lacks the capacity for such an intuition *ought* at least to possess it." Schelling, *System*, 33; *SW*, III, 376.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 28; *SW*, III, 369 – 371.

situation. Discussing the problem that intellectual intuition implies a bound-breaking overstepping of the hierarchical limits imposed on thought by negativity, Schelling writes:

We recognize as ideal that activity only which goes, and insofar as it goes, beyond the boundary. This bound-breaking activity has therefore to be bounded, a contradiction already implicit in the requirement that the self as sensing (*i.e.* as subject) shall become an object; and there is no resolving this contradiction *unless it be that bound-breaking and becoming bounded are one and the same for the ideal self*, or unless the self become real, precisely through its being ideal.

Suppose this were so; suppose that the self were to be limited by its mere overstepping of the limit, it would in thus overstepping, still be ideal, and hence *qua* ideal, or in its ideality, be real and limited. The question is, how anything of the sort is conceivable.<sup>79</sup>

And shortly after:

This self-intuition in both its ideal and real activities, the one limit-passing and sensing, the other limit-restricted and sensed, is possible only through a third activity, *at once* confined within the limit and extending beyond it, *at once* real and ideal, and it is in *this* activity that the self becomes an object to itself as having sensation. Insofar as the self *senses*, it is ideal; insofar as it is an object, real; that activity, therefore, whereby, as sensing, it becomes an object, must be simultaneously both ideal and real.

The problem of explaining how the self intuits itself as sensing, could thus also be formulated as one of explaining how, *in one and the same activity*, the self becomes both ideal and real. This simultaneously ideal and real activity is that producing activity we postulated, wherein activeness and passiveness are reciprocally conditioned by each other.<sup>80</sup>

Schelling's attempt at a solution to the problem is to postulate the self, the I, as a point of identity ( $I = I$ ), what he will also call *indifference*, between the ideal and the real. This means that the movements of negativity which reduce all to objects, and the flight of subjectivity, which cannot be reduced because it is the condition of all reduction, turn out

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<sup>79</sup> Schelling, *System*, 66; *SW*, III, 418 – 419.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 67 – 68; *SW*, III, 420 – 422.

to be grounded quite literally in one and the same thing: the self as postulate. The self, then, seems to be the positive result of negativity. And while Schelling appears to be imputing the workings of negativity wholly to the self, as touched on earlier, this result will be treated later as just a privileged moment of the absolute as a whole whereby the ideal and real coincide regionally within an individual, but whose coincidence is in fact the principle of reality. Indifference as postulated principle, then, is just the view adopted in which subject and object dwell together regardless of their relative positions, *viz.* in one system. All activity in such a system, then, is *the same* activity of the absolute.<sup>81</sup> To refer again to my earlier comparisons to Frege, perhaps this would be like viewing the logical workings of concept and object and collected under one formal system.

Now, even if we were to accept this act of postulation, then either one of two problematic results emerge: (1) the act of postulation as *regulative* has no pretense of access to the absolute, which seems to involve Schelling in a contradiction since it would affirm our limitations, condemning us to finitude and therefore the rules of negativity, which this act aims to extend beyond, or (2) we somehow sit at the edge of the absolute, which furnishes this identity between ideal and real, subject and object, etc., somehow gaining insight into its workings as such. But this latter option is more than a mere postulation or rather is one that involves a sort of circularity.

This circularity lies in the fact that in order to avoid the postulate's fate in (1), the position of (2) must mean that the so-called postulate we happen to take up as a regulative assumption in order to make sense of subjectivity turns out to be the case all

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<sup>81</sup> This leads to an issue to which Schelling will become sensitive: whether or not individuals are ultimately real from such a perspective. The answer he provides in 1802's *Bruno* appears to be: *not really*.

along, making it in fact a *constitutive* principle of the absolute and therefore not merely a regulative postulate. In other words, this conclusion of postulation reached at the third level of reflection turns out to have been its own premise. The postulate would then act as a speculative ladder—a bombastic hypothesis—that we kick away once we gain insight into the absolute. It is a postulate that will have turned out to be the case all along and thus not be a postulate at all. Rather, it would have to be the necessary condition for this postulate in order for it not amount to a contradiction. This latter scenario would help explain why Schelling is keen on saying the act of intellectual intuition taps into an extratemporal, constitutive principle of the absolute. For in saying that we have such access, we reach behind the limitations endemic to finitude, and occupy a privileged space that moves beyond it—the place of the unconditioned. Thus, the identity between subject and object formalized as  $I = I$  that Schelling demands cannot result without there already being an actual, constitutive absolute identity prior to this act.<sup>82</sup>

In truth, perhaps the best way to view this situation is to see the workings of negativity and reflection as reaching a legitimate a point of failure. In other words, Schelling's analysis here simply does not succeed in that it amounts to either a simple contradiction or an obtuse circularity.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, we might say that things of the world appear to be finite and consistent until they are elevated to a level where this is no longer the case, and this is actually how things are. A contradiction is forced by way of

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<sup>82</sup> This, I believe, is roughly Hölderlin's point in "Über Urtheil und Seyn." See Friedrich Hölderlin, "Über Urtheil und Seyn" (1795), trans., H.S. Harris, in H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Toward the Sunlight, 1770–1801*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 515 – 516.

<sup>83</sup> Not surprisingly, the problems discussed here are found in the iterations of Fichte's work. For a critical analysis of these issues in relation to Fichte, see Henrich, "The Paradoxical Self-Relatedness of Consciousness," in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, 246 – 262.

the indexical uttering of the I and breaks with the discursive rigidity of the rules of Schellingian negativity. Such a break would precisely be the point where Schelling could find his opening and make his postulation. Such a contradictory break would therefore amount to its condition of possibility.

But here the claim of postulation would be less so a realism of some “eternal and timeless act” of an Absolute I, and more so a matter of founding a system retroactively at its own point of failure, whereby one must take up a position and run with it because one ought to. But one only can make this demand if this identity were there all along. This would mean, however, affirming both a contradiction and a circularity.

Regardless, Schelling in 1801 will alter his course. He will inaugurate his system instead from the point of view of a bare non-subjective absolute principle of identity rather than engineer it out of a subject’s own cursed reflections. Although he himself will claim his *System* and his 1801 “Presentation” are continuous in the preface to the latter, they are not least of all because the problems of postulation discussed.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, if the absolute I all along presupposed the claim of the identity between the real and ideal, why, then, is this absolute an ‘I’, a subject in some sense, and not just the absolute identity of real and ideal as such? As Schelling will later say in his Würzburg lectures:

If our spirit did not involve a [form of] knowledge completely independent of all subjectivity and no longer the knowledge of the subject as subject but a knowledge of that which exists in strict autonomy ([i.e., a knowledge] of the unconditionally One), we would indeed have to abandon all philosophy; our entire thinking and knowing would leave us eternally trapped within the sphere of subjectivity.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 344; *SW*, IV, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Schelling, “System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular,” 145; *SW*, VI, 143.

In 1801, Schelling officially breaks free from the trap of subjectivity thereby making his philosophy not that of the absolute I, but of identity. So, in a way, the contradiction encountered in Schelling's postulated imperfect identity perhaps does end up providing an opening for him to begin once more, to postulate a new system and run with it.<sup>86</sup>

## VII. The Geometer's Line: Schelling on Postulation

I will now undertake a cursory overview of some of Schelling's thoughts on the idea of postulation throughout his earlier career. While his thinking here deserves an entire study of its own, particularly in its relation to Kant's thoughts on mathematics and postulation and Schelling's criticisms of this, I will confine myself only to a few remarks so as to show that this less speculative style of thinking is a mainstay of Schelling's foundationalist thought, in spite of all his greater dogmatic moments.<sup>87</sup>

Schelling does not simply appropriate the language of postulation and formal systems as an explanatory expedient. Rather, he is explicit throughout his earlier career

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<sup>86</sup> In his "On the True Concept", published shortly before his official break with Fichte in 1801's "Presentation," Schelling will explain that the move from the I of absolute subjectivity to the non-subjective absolute takes on a particular chronology. While subjectivity emerges out of nature, Schelling claims, we begin with subjectivity and then 'depotentiate' objects, freeing them from the standpoint of subjectivity:

There is an idealism of nature and an idealism of the I. For me, the former is original, *the latter* is derived. . . . There is no question that this philosophy on philosophising is subjectively (in relation to the philosophising subject) the *first* . . . To see the objective in its first coming-into-being is only possible by *depotentiating* the *object* of all philosophising, which in the highest potency is = I, and then constructing, from the beginning, with this object reduced to the first potency.

Schelling, "On the True Concept," 49; *SW*, IV, 84 – 85. While this provides a much more coherent picture and helps iron out the kinks in Schelling's critical shift in ontological emphasis, it certainly contravenes earlier statements. For instance, as remarked in the fifth footnote of this chapter, Schelling states in 1800's *System* that transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of nature are opposed to one another do not merge. However, here the suggestion is that in fact the subject emerges out nature itself, though we learn this, naturally, by beginning from subjectivity.

<sup>87</sup> For a short discussion on Schelling's view in relation to Kant, see Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 585 – 588.

that what he envisions he is doing is akin to geometry. Upon reaching his notion of intellectual intuition in *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling draws a comparison between the postulate of the self and that of a straight line:

Transcendental philosophy, however, proceeds from no existent, but from a free act, and such an act can only be postulated. . . . That, for example, is how geometry proceeds, in that it sets out, not from theorems, but from postulates. In that the most primary construction therein is postulated, and the pupil himself left to bring it forth, it is dependent from the start upon self-construction. —So too with transcendental philosophy . . . the product [of the self] is in no sense *external* to the construction, it *exists* at all only in being constructed, and has no more existence in abstraction from the construction than does the geometer's line.<sup>88</sup>

The self's generation out of intellectual intuition therefore is the initiatory construction that gets his system of the absolute going. Everything that follows from this postulation in mind then acts like the geometer's construction of proofs within a geometrical system.<sup>89</sup> Schelling will claim that by reflecting on particular oppositions within reality and thought, and elevating them to the point of convergence or indifference founded by the self, the system achieves its further articulations *qua* demonstrations. And without these progressive proofs, the system is nothing.

Following a comparison between the line and the self similar to the last quote above, Schelling writes in the appendix "On Postulates in Philosophy" of his 1797 essay "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge" that

the student must be *immersed*, so to speak, in the transcendental method. Hence the first principle must already by *his own construction*, which is *required* of (and left to) him, for him to learn at the outset that whatever originates for him by means of this construction is *nothing outside* of it, and that it *exists* only to the extent that he constructs.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Schelling, *System*, 28-9; *SW*, III, 371 – 372.

<sup>89</sup> Here I set aside the complication of different forms of geometry. Schelling obviously has in mind Euclid's system.

<sup>90</sup> Schelling, "Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge," 135; *SW*, I, 448.

A few pages later, Schelling suggests that the initial postulate of the system is not simply a result reached once and for all, not one understood “simply by beholding it, impassively, black on white.”<sup>91</sup> Rather, the implication, though not entirely explicit in this text, is that it must be taken up as a postulate of a system whose significance is only realized in its mobilization by means of something akin to a “mathematical procedure” where the things of mere appearance are “reconceived” by means of constructions.<sup>92</sup>

This lends Schelling’s idea of postulation its strength as well as its weakness. While postulates allow us to begin our demonstrations, they themselves must first be assumed. They are, in other words, the condition of possibility of demonstration. As Schelling notes in 1800: “Self-consciousness is the lamp of the whole system of knowledge, but it casts its light ahead only, not behind.”<sup>93</sup> However, such an assumption is not supposed to be blind, but *self*-evident. The suggestion, then, is that his postulation is not simply the question begging assertion that there is an absolute self or absolute as such. Or, if it is, it is at least no more question begging than geometric postulation.

Whether or not Schelling’s move here is illegal, I think, depends not on his overt metaphysical flights of fancy, but rather on his monistic argument discussed in Chapter 2 as well as his analysis of intellectual intuition. On his account, we must assume a unifying principle, whatever it is, if we are to understand the cohesion of the world or if there is to be a world at all. However, this only raises the question if the requirement for epistemic cohesion really amounts to ontological cohesion, that is, the cohesion of the

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 137; *SW*, I, 450.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 135; *SW*, I, 447.

<sup>93</sup> Schelling, *System*, 18; *SW*, III, 357-8.



world in itself. This requirement may just be supplied by a knowing subject and say nothing of the world in itself. It is no surprise then that Schelling's unifying principle first is the result of the transcendental subject becoming evident to itself and only later becomes a matter of the non-subjective absolute becoming evident to itself *via* emergent subjectivity. Without the latter, our knowledge cannot really be said to reach beyond subjectivity, which spells trouble for Schelling's realist and natural scientific commitments.<sup>94</sup>

The trouble is that while the former commitment maintains quite literally the spirit of self-evidence that makes the notion of postulation appealing, it fails to deliver the central benefit of the latter, i.e., mind-independent reality.<sup>95</sup> This tension, while already present in his earliest writings on *Naturphilosophie*, will become the central feature of his answer to this dilemma: the tension between subjectivity and objectivity simply is the unifying principle—the absolute is unified in its disunity. However, his earlier discussions on this issue places more emphasis on how this tension unfolds and eventually resolves itself in some way or other by means of so-called constructions. It is only irregularly that he will lay emphasis on the idea that the absolute in itself, as a matter

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<sup>94</sup> For instance, though still trapped in the subjectivist framework of transcendental philosophy, Schelling already makes clear in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*:

If all our knowing 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.

Schelling, *Ideas*, 173; *SW*, II, 216.

<sup>95</sup> Consult the final quote in the prior section. See Schelling, “System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular,” 145; *SW*, VI, 14.

of principle, is negative, fundamentally divided in difference, whether it is between subjectivity and objectivity, ideality and reality, activity and passivity, etc.

The idea of constructions acting as the progressive proof of a system and thereby sustaining it is given a lengthier treatment in Schelling's 1802 "Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy," which acts as a sequel to the inaugural text of his *Identitätssystem*, 1801's "Presentation of My System of Philosophy." In this 1802 text, Schelling defines construction as follows: "*construction* is, first and in general, exhibition of the particular inside absolute form, and *philosophical construction in particular*, the exhibition of the particular within form considered without qualification . . . but form as intuited in itself or intellectually."<sup>96</sup> However, what this means might not be so impressive. If the postulate of the absolute is simply an identity between the real and ideal (the now generalized and non-subjective  $A = A$  rather than  $I = I$ ), and construction is just demonstrating how particular things resolve in this identity ("absolute form"), does this not amount to much other than showing how everything belongs in everything? Is this not precisely "the night in which . . . all cows are black" scandalously proclaimed by Hegel, the night whereby the vacuous identity of the absolute is pitted against the diversity of the world?<sup>97</sup> Some of Schelling's own words in his essay seem to suggest as much:

Construction is thus, from start to finish, an absolute kind of cognition and [for just this reason] it has nothing to do with the actual world as such but is in its very nature idealism [if idealism means the doctrine of the *ideas*]. For it is precisely this world that is commonly called actual that is abolished by construction. You call the particular form, e.g., the plant or animal, etc., actual. Precisely this is abolished within construction, for (according to what was proved earlier) the

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<sup>96</sup> Schelling, "Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy," 394; *SW*, IV, 408.

<sup>97</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §16.

construction contains no more than the possibility of, e.g., the plant, *as form of the universe*. . . . *That which makes every construction absolute is identical or one and the same with what serves as the principle of connection for philosophical demonstration.*<sup>98</sup>

Still, in his defense, Schelling's earlier excursions into *Naturphilosophie* and treatment of various empirical subjects is evidence that he is in fact sophisticated enough and capable of more than merely repetitious proofs that any particular opposition existing in reality dissolves into the homogenous connective tissue of absolute identity.<sup>99</sup> At the end of the day, Schelling's expansion on the idea of construction, while without much actual demonstration, should suggest to us that he is attempting to at least show how his system can be made possible through an implied series of interconnections, despite the questionable status and demand of its unitive postulate.<sup>100</sup>

In his 1810 "Stuttgart Seminars," a text that still maintains the absolute identity of real and ideal, Schelling stresses the fundamentally conflict ridden, negative character between the real and ideal in his ontological system.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Schelling will hold on to his idea of the progressive demonstration of the absolute as well as his comparisons to geometry.<sup>102</sup> Yet, what is of further import is the manner in which he speaks of the

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<sup>98</sup> Schelling, "Further Presentations," 395; *SW*, IV, 408 – 409.

<sup>99</sup> In the introduction to his translation of "Further Presentations," Vater suggests that Schelling envisions a "taxonomical space" that is generated by this ongoing act of constructive integration. Considering the amount of detail Schelling goes into with his *Naturphilosophie*, especially given the fact that he begins such reflections with the speculative and simplistic premise of a fundamental opposition existing in nature, I'm inclined to agree. See *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>100</sup> See Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, 577.

<sup>101</sup> As discussed earlier, an earlier attempt to emphasize opposition is found in 1804's *Philosophy and Religion*. Schelling's 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* takes this emphasis in a new direction.

<sup>102</sup> "The existence of what is unconditional cannot be proven like the existence of something finite. The unconditional is the element wherein any demonstration becomes possible. Where the geometrician, when setting about the demonstration of a given concept, does not begin by proving the existence of space but rather presupposes it, philosophy, too, does not demonstrate the existence of God but confesses that it could

tension between the ideal and real by invoking the language of axioms. In this text, Schelling asserts that the hierarchical interactions between the real and ideal amount to what he will call an axiological difference: “It is here that we arrive at the concept of the *powers* so crucial for our entire investigation. Initially, we have something superior and something inferior, that is, an *axiological* difference. The Ideal ranks higher than the Real in respect to its dignity.”<sup>103</sup> This difference, however, Schelling is careful to specify, should not be conflated with chronological priority: “the Real is by its very nature the first [*natura prius*], and the Ideal is the latter. The inferior [power, i.e., *B*] thus is indeed posited *before* the superior one, though not in an axiological sense, which would be contradictory, but as regards its *existence*.”<sup>104</sup> Read naturalistically, while nature in general, as the predominance of the real or objectivity, comes to exist prior to minded subjectivity, which as ideal emerges out of nature, the difference between the real and ideal subsists together as a formal rule within the so-called logic of his system—ideality, in other words, is dormant, to one more evoke Schelling’s beloved Leibnizian metaphor of the sleeping monad. Thus, the ideal, which allows the real to be uncovered and reflected on, is present in Schelling’s system from the beginning, axiomatically different from the real, and permanently forced to be stratified within a hierarchy of reflection.<sup>105</sup>

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not even exist without the absolute or God. Everything can be presented only in the absolute; hence the unconditional does not precede the practice of philosophy, but philosophy in its entirety is occupied with the existence of the former, [and] all of philosophy is properly speaking the progressive demonstration of the absolute, which therefore cannot be demanded from the outset of philosophy.” Schelling, “Stuttgart Seminars,” 199; *SW*, VII, 423 – 424.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 202; *SW*, VII, 427.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> This axiological difference marks a subtle shift in emphasis, though not the first of its kind. The  $I = I$  arrived at in 1800 that failed to exhibit an identity without presupposing the constitutive absolute  $I$ , which then became broadened as  $A = A$  in 1801, is now specified with an emphasis on difference. While both ideal and real coexist in the absolute as a rule, this rule is one that demands opposition *tout court*. As he was wont to do, Schelling will claim this principle’s oppositional element was emphasized in his work all

The task of construction or demonstration, then, is to show the ways in which even that which appears wholly real or natural nonetheless contains elements of ideality imminent to it.

To conclude, I would like to briefly take stock of what is worth carrying forward. I wish to follow Schelling's suggestion that the relation between the mind and the body, but also the activity of the world at large, is marked by a negative character. I believe that his notion, which we might also describe as an axiological difference in reality, which gives shape to negativity, is fruitful and is no more radical than the logical distinction between concept and object.<sup>106</sup> And if the behaviors of subjectivity and reality at large have an evasive ideal character, suppose we were to posit this process as perpetually undermined, appearing to disappear, which cannot be grasped upon reflection. Seen from the perspective of the function, internal to the system—performing a 'phenomenology' of the function if you will permit the metaphor—the activities of the world and subjectivity are continuously reduced to something other, *viz.*, objects in a function. While strictly speaking such a processual activity is not at all illustrated and only implied, the general picture finds a reliable formal model.

To verify this, the criteria needed, I believe, is not the way in which the model *can* account for subjectivity or activity, which on this picture is ever evasive, but the way in which it *cannot*. If this systematic irremediability—this axiological difference—fails to

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along. Reading a consistent narrative back into the course of his career, one indeed caught in moments but not entirely truthful, Schelling writes: "I have always made it clear that, for me, absolute identity is not a *mere* identity but the identity of unity and oppositionality." *Ibid.*, 215; *SW*, VII, 445.

<sup>106</sup> This is not to say, however, that reality really does obey such a distinction. Rather, we can approach this position as Schelling does on occasion, seeing this as merely a principle. It is, we might say, a *working model* of reality that allows us to explain matters consistently.

differ from our own inabilities, the very ones which lead us to mount an investigation in the first place, and if this in turn allows us to explain how such inabilities give rise to more expedient theories—intellectual illusions—while nonetheless allowing us to explain the latter away, such criteria would be met. The task, therefore, is not in seeking a solution but in articulating why one cannot be found, why alleged solutions fail, but can be accounted for nonetheless. This would also be, I believe, to maintain the spirit of Schelling's notion of construction, whereby the groundwork of his ontology gains its legitimacy in its ability to hold its own in encountered phenomenon, here by means of illustrating the illusory nature other philosophical positions.

However, going forward, I do not wish to hold on to Schelling's obtuse arguments in favor of intellectual intuition, nor do I want to merely claim that we must adopt his ontological conception wholesale by means of postulation; for it should be clear by now that the dubious nature of some of his reasoning does not quite lend itself the force of a postulate. Luckily, I believe there is a better way to get at Schelling's assertion that there is an evasive opposition between the ideal and real, mind and body. Aside from the analogy to concept/object, there is an argument to be made for the notion of activity *qua* ideal as Schelling envisions it—unconditioned and elusive—that, while not present in such a formal model, nonetheless exists *anhypothetically*, that is, as a fundamental principle proven indirectly or refutationally, i.e., contestable only on pain of inconsistency.<sup>107</sup> To this I now turn.

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<sup>107</sup> See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans., Ray Brassier, (London: Continuum, 2013), 60 – 61.

#### Chapter 4: Lacunary Causality – On Schellingian Unconditioned Activity, the Determinable/Determinate Distinction, and the Possibility of Mental Causation

Since all religions are founded against the insufficiency of mere existence, of mere creatureliness, none has yet preached inactivity, nor ever could have.

—Ernst Bloch<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I wish to rehabilitate Schelling's reinterpretation of the *natura naturata/natura naturans* distinction. These terms can be roughly divided into two opposed ontological categories. While the latter describes any and everything that might fall under the heading of productivity or activity, the former describes the opposite, anything seen as a product. Schelling's central contribution to this distinction is in his thesis, discussed in the prior chapter, that these categories operate processually in that one perpetually gives way to and yields the other.<sup>2</sup> The assertion, however, is not one which just trivially claims that actions lead to consequences, causes to effects, or productivities to products. Rather, Schelling contends that this distinction has an epistemically asymmetrical character. One runs the risk of losing sight of one category in focusing on the other. The potential outcome for Schelling is that this epistemic asymmetry can mislead us into arguing in favor an ontological asymmetry, one in which the activities of the world may not correctly factor into our understanding of the world.<sup>3</sup> This latter consequence leads to several suggestions as to how we are to correctly model

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, trans., Anthony A. Nassar, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 74 – 75.

<sup>2</sup> See Černý, “Von der natura naturans zum »unvordenklichen Seyn« Eine Linie des Materialismus bei Schelling?,” 130.

<sup>3</sup> As noted in the prior chapter, Schelling also asserts the possibility of asymmetries in the opposite direction, whereby productivity in itself is emphasized at the cost of products. I set this issue aside for the simple reason that the dominant ontological candidate for contemporary models of causation are physicalist and do not take this alternative possibility seriously.

reality and the in-built ontological illusions that, according to Schelling, tempt us to misunderstand reality. Thus, the distinction should not be taken simply as a description of two epistemically competing and therefore separate positions on the workings of the world at large. Rather, this competition is a feature imminent to Schelling's various systems.

While the general implications of these issues extend as much to Schelling's analyses of nature and the empirical sciences as they do to his positions on transcendental philosophy and his later philosophy of identity, I wish to confine myself to one target: a theory of causation following this picture. I wish to do so because I believe this in turn offers us insights toward a Schelling-inspired account of mental causation, one that might be considered non-physicalist or physicalist in an expanded or reconceived sense. To put it quickly, for Schelling theories of causation, and so with them theories of mental causation, may perennially appear to be inured to physicalist frameworks, where the basic thesis is that all facts are facts that consist of and only of physical facts. This does not mean, however, that for Schelling causation can in actuality be wholly reduced to physical facts. I will argue that causation cannot be wholly reduced to physical facts because causation itself presupposes a notion, namely unconditioned activity, that must be a condition of possibility the physical.

I believe the relevance of this argument offers a potential demonstration of a weak form of a greater conjecture, *viz.* that the causal work of the mental cannot be located wholly amongst the physical. In contrast to the larger project of narrowing down the causal workings of the mental, the weak form of the argument I will provide evades the demands of locating mentality in the first place. The argument I instead provide does not



attempt to show that there is such a thing as causally efficacious mentality, only that if there were such a thing, it would not be wholly physical because causes themselves are not wholly physical—at least in a certain sense I will specify below. Thus, if causes are not wholly physical, *a fortiori* mental causes are not either. The reasons for this will also happen to furnish an ancillary argument for framing why Schelling cannot be a physicalist in the more orthodox senses, though this will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter.

By this point, Schelling's perspective on this matter should reveal no surprises. Mental causes, like all causes, will appear differently than they let on upon conceptual analysis. This is because the ontological structure of causation for him is one cursed by ontological negativity, the principal culprit of the asymmetry under discussion. Causal events always have the capacity to appear—insufficiently—reductively as static and particularized (physical) facts. Of course, pointing to the sweeping notion of Schellingian negativity as such does not do the work needed to demonstrate this claim.

My investigation will focus on an analysis of Schelling's assertions regarding the notion of unconditioned activity, which for my purposes is the term I will primarily utilize, though as noted earlier this term is but one amongst many Schelling evokes (e.g., *natura naturans*, productivity, constructing, becoming, succession, etc.). An examination of Schellingian activity is critical to a study of his perspectives on causation. Though, Schelling does not confine himself to causation in his writings on the topic of activity, this notion is what enchants causes with a non-physical lustre.

In the first section of this chapter, I provide a brief background of Schelling's position and then offer the broader argument that the notion of activity cannot be located

amongst the physical facts of the world. To reference Schelling's own terminology, the argument specifically concerns the claim that any and all activities in the world have an unconditioned character. Here I set aside the finer exegetical details of Schelling's writings on the matter and focus on a premise-by-premise justification of the position and address some minor objections. In the second section, I address some larger objections to the argument and offer some counters. Finally, in the third section, I narrow the broader argument down such that it concerns causation specifically instead of the general notion of activity. Here I introduce Stephen Yablo's determinable/determinate distinction, which I believe offers us a coherent way to capture what Schelling is after when it comes to causal explanations. After, I outline some speculative consequences of the position for a theory of mental causation.

### **I. Activity and its Place in Nature: The Argument for Unconditioned Activity**

Before I present the argument, it will be helpful to review a central concept of Schelling's work discussed in the second chapter, namely the notion of unconditionality. Recall that according to Kant, reason seeks to unify the principles of our understanding and bring them into thoroughgoing connection with one another. Possessing the ability to ascend through what appears to be an endless chain of inferences, reason seeks out the conditions of our knowledge, and the conditions of those conditions, and so forth. What constitutes a condition here is left ambiguous, but Kant identifies several forms, e.g., that a cause conditions its effect (causal conditions), that parts condition a whole (mereological conditions), that a necessity conditions a contingency (modal conditions),

etc.<sup>4</sup> Put in explanatory terms, a condition is an explicans of an explicandum. The broad idea therefore is that a condition stands in a dependence relation. Something is conditioned if and only if it depends on something else, viz., a condition or set of conditions. Something is unconditioned, then, if and only if it depends on nothing else. Kant construes the desire for the latter as the desire for an ultimate epistemic ground or basis for all conditions. Though Kant believed the aspiration to reach such an unconditioned principle was true to the ambitions of reason, he makes clear such a principle could never be verified in possible experience, and so could never be epistemically validated within his system.

However, Schelling lays much more emphasis on the notion of the unconditioned than Kant. Depending on the period of his thinking, Schelling believes this notion of the unconditioned must at least be postulated as the basis of his philosophical system, eventually going so far as to say in his philosophy of identity period that the unconditioned can in fact be cognized.<sup>5</sup>

Schelling treats the notion of activity as the primary constituent of his unconditioned principle. What this looks like depends on the period of his thought. The transcendental idealist Schelling attributes unconditioned activity to the absolute subject who gains access to the unconditioned by way of an intellectual intuition of the I=I. As for Schelling's earlier philosophy of nature, this emphasis on unconditioned activity becomes one of the activity of nature itself. However, Schelling makes clear this activity of nature is not nature viewed as mere objects, products, or *natura naturata*, but nature

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<sup>4</sup> See Watkins, "The early Schelling on the unconditioned," 14 – 15.

<sup>5</sup> See Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," §7, 351; *SW*, IV, 117.

viewed itself as subject, productivity, or *natura naturans*.<sup>6</sup> This claim of nature as subject is somewhat bombastic in that Schelling does not take nature itself to be literally a subject in the sense of thinking subjectivity. I set aside the finer details of this issue here, but Schelling's earlier philosophy of nature grows out of his transcendental idealism, whereby nature is viewed as analogous to subjectivity and imbued with ideality—activity itself falling under this heading.<sup>7</sup> And by the time of his philosophy of identity period, the activity of the absolute is one that integrates both views, whereby the active thinking subject descends from the activity of nature.<sup>8</sup> This later position of Schelling's is probably the best to keep in mind when thinking about activity and causation from a realist standpoint as I am inclined to do, though again Schelling himself vacillates on a realist conception prior to 1801. Even when he is overtly transcendental idealist, realism about the absolute, nature, etc., can sneak into the picture.

With that said, I wish to narrow down my focus on Schelling and avoid scrutinizing the iterations of his views and arguing where he is a realist and where he is not. For the purposes of definitional clarity, I will draw much from Schelling's 1799 *First Outline*. While this work is not representative of Schelling's more mature, realist *Identitätsystem*, let alone a lasting version of his philosophy of nature that develops out of the former's realism, the text has exegetical appeal for my purposes. The reason for this is that Schelling directly treats of the notions of unconditionedness, activity, and their

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<sup>6</sup> See Schelling, *First Outline*, 202; *SW*, III, 284.

<sup>7</sup> I demystify and survey many of Schelling's bombastic views in Chapter 6.

<sup>8</sup> This thesis itself was probably influenced by Herder, whom Schelling occasionally references. Herder offered a then-famous reinterpretation of Spinoza that tried to unite the latter's attributes of extension and thought, treating them as having an identical origin in nature's active forces. See for instance: Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, 103, 123.

conjunction, instead of his conceptually loaded, obtuse analyses of the I = I of his transcendental idealist period or the A = A of his philosophy of identity period. In the *First Outline*, when considering nature as unconditioned, Schelling explicitly asserts that “the unconditioned is everywhere = to absolute activity.”<sup>9</sup>

For present purposes, there are two important claims Schelling lays out in the text for what qualifies as unconditioned. First, Schelling asserts in the text that “*The unconditioned cannot be sought in any individual ‘thing’ nor in anything of which one can say that it ‘is.’ For what ‘is’ only partakes of being, and is only an individual form or kind of being.*”<sup>10</sup> In other words, the unconditioned is not any particularity. Furthermore, this implies for him the unconditioned is independent of all particular inferences.

Importantly, this will mean for Schelling that it is a special class of generality, “a *principle of being.*”<sup>11</sup> Though he rarely frames the issue so plainly, this is a central aspect of Schelling’s thinking: some generalities are ontological real and efficacious. What this means will take some time to dissect in what follows.

As a side note, though not in play in the *First Outline*, in later works Schelling will also speak of this issue of real and efficacious generalities in terms of his notion of ideas. This term might be more illustrative of his thinking on activity better than perhaps the misleading notion of a principle, which may seem inert and something merely maintained as a thought. Ideas are not necessarily free-floating thoughts we may have about the workings of the world. Rather, ideas (in a non-Kantian sense) can be imminent

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<sup>9</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 20; *SW*, III, 22.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 13; *SW*, III, 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; *SW*, III, 11 – 12.

to the workings of the world for Schelling, though this is only something he resolutely asserts in his philosophy of identity period.<sup>12</sup>

Second, though the unconditioned is not itself “an individual form or kind of being”, it, he states, can be found in everything: “For if everything that ‘is’ is only, as it were, the color of the unconditioned, then the unconditioned itself must everywhere become manifest through itself.”<sup>13</sup> So, unconditionality is not just a general principle, but one maximally so, and not just independent of particulars but applicable to all. As a result, unconditionality has a unique asymmetry to it. The claim is not as magical as it may let on. The unconditioned for him is the ground of all other conditions, so of course it applies to everything. The point Schelling is trying to make is more or less Kantian. The unconditioned is a maximally broad condition of possibility, one that structures the totality of experience.

However, the scope of Schelling’s claim is not limited to epistemology and possible experience as it is for Kant. Schelling, or more precisely the Schelling we are concerned with, will eventually come around to saying that unconditionality is a matter of *ontological priority* of the highest order. This is an important claim to dwell on. We say something is *ontically prior* when it accounts for or is responsible for the existence of something else.<sup>14</sup> Existence here is a tricky word, however, so we might opt for something a little clumsier, e.g., responsible for some particularity (e.g., properties,

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<sup>12</sup> See the sixth chapter’s discussion on Schelling’s *University Studies* for a discussion of his non-Kantian notion of ideas.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*; *SW*, III, 12.

<sup>14</sup> See Paul Audi, “Properties, Powers, and the Subset Account of Realization,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LXXXIV, No. 3, (May 2012), 654 – 674.

powers, etc.) of something else. For instance, we like to think that in general parts are ontically prior to their wholes. That is, a particular whole is built out of its parts, and not *vice versa*. Likewise, particular causes are ontically prior to their particular effects. Kant's talk of conditionality is basically talk of different types of ontic priority, although there are several complications in relation to Kant we need not entertain here.

In contrast to ontic priority, since ontology is concerned with issues more basic than any particular priority, we say that something is ontologically prior when it accounts for the (general) existence of anything else. Using the works like 'building' or 'causing' here, however, does not seem to function in the same way as it does with ontic priority. Ontology concerns existence as such. It would be a mistake to think particulars are built purely out of or caused wholly by ontological generalities. Rather, the question of ontological priority is the question of what is needed for particulars to be possible and intelligible in the first place.

Thus, that which is ontologically prior seems to do work in a different way than that which is ontically prior. But the two should not be incompatible. That is, a good ontology's categories, principles, ideas, etc., should operate in such a way so as not to collide or compete with ontic categories thereby leading to symptoms of bad explanation, e.g., overdetermination or epiphenomenality in either direction. The search for the unconditioned, being a maximally independent generality and asymmetrically grounding principle, turns out to be a quest for ontological priority tempered by the threats of explanatory defects. Talk of unconditionality, then, is talk of ontological priority. It should be noted again, however, that Schelling himself does not strictly speaking always think this. This is because unconditionality, taken in the Kantian sense, is not ontological.

However, as stated above, by 1801 Schelling makes clear unconditionality is cognizable and so is real for him.

Turning now to the notion of activity, like so many of Schelling's declarations, the justification as to why the activity is what will count as unconditioned, and so ontologically prior, is tangled amongst a skein of claims, motivations, and plainly unsupported propositions. However, Schelling's most sympathetic reasoning is premised on the Cartesian foundationalist tradition of abandoning all prior beliefs and assumptions:

Originally, no *individual being* at all (as an accomplished fact) is present for us in Nature, for otherwise our project is not philosophy, but empirical investigation.— We must observe what an object is in its *first origin*. First of all, everything that is in Nature, and Nature considered as sum total of *existence*, is not even present for us.<sup>15</sup>

In conceptually grounding the natural sciences, to assume the existence of any particular object is already to assume too much. This is because for empiricism a (natural) product is one that has already arrived. On the side of the observer, there must be an activity of observation. On the side of the observed, an activity must bring about and sustain its ability to be observed.

Thus, Schelling argues, in order to begin to structure our thinking on the sciences and nature as a whole, we must assume *absolute activity*, or what we might call *activity in itself*, which I will define as the notion of happening *per se*. This is a hazy definition, so consider it a first approximation. It is important to qualify activity as “absolute” or “in itself” in the sense of an abstraction. That is, the notion in the widest sense stripped down to its essentials. It does not concern a sum total of activities, which presupposes some differentiation and specificity, and so the realm of the ontic. Although “happening *per se*”

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<sup>15</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 14; *SW*, III, 13.



is not the ideal way to clarify matters, and perhaps shrouds an obscurity with another, the aim is simply to capture the verb-like, ongoing quality of the notion—happening or activity in an unqualified sense.

None of this should imply that Schelling is meaningfully opposed to further specifying particular activities or happenings according to our explanatory commitments and standards. A denial of this would push his claim to absurdity. The thesis is only that ontologically common to all such specifications is the barely necessary condition of activity. How bare this notion is should be emphasized. It is important to affirm that Schelling is hardly saying anything at all with the term. That this is a bare necessity but still nonetheless necessary will be examined in the final section.

With that said, what precisely is the argument we wish he would make? Let us gather together our definitions and premises and try to manufacture a point. First let me reiterate three definitions laid out above. First, I say that something is conditioned if and only if it depends on something else. Second, something is unconditioned if and only if it depends on nothing else.

These definitions strike me as fairly uncontroversial. Really, they are just claims that I have more or less taken from Kant and Schelling. Perhaps the notion of dependency hiding amongst these statements is questionable. However, it is important at this stage of the argument to maintain the ambiguity noted above. Conditions do not just concern causal descriptions, they do not just concern logic, but modal, mereological, and in general inferential ones. Is this a sloppy point to make? Eliding the various distinctions of dependence in part depends a lot on one's ontology and specifically how one wants to frame issues of metaphysical grounding and realization. As I argued in the second

chapter, Schelling's whole foundationalist monism is premised on the idea that a system eventually must come down to one unitive principle. Again: this does not mean that he is opposed to further specifying differences in ontic dependence. It is just that to do that is already to do something—something must happen—and so presupposes the broader notion of activity.

This leads me to my third definition: activity in itself is the notion of happening *per se*. The issue, I think, becomes whether or not unconditioned activity *qua* unitive principle is necessary for each of these dependence relations discussed above. In other words, the issue is if activity in itself enjoys ontological priority. There are two sides of this issue, the side of generality and the side of activity. On the topic of the former, does it make sense to speak of a “*per se*” or “in itself” as doing anything? Are we just outsourcing more exacting explanatory power by taking advantage of the cheap labor of generalities? The question turns on just what exactly it means to say activity in itself is doing work because some senses of the proposition that a generality does work are certainly not valid. I will address this in the third section. As for the notion of activity, while the idea of a happening seems easily admissible when it comes to causal relations, we might argue that, generality or not, even specifying what kind of activity we are concerned with makes less sense for, say, modal or logical relations. Do necessities or logical conditions really have an activity to them? Schelling at least thinks so. With that said, consider the following argument:

*The Argument for Unconditioned Activity*

- (1) Either activity in itself is conditioned by something else or nothing else.
  - (2) If something is conditioned by something else, the latter must furnish an activity different from the former.
  - (3) If activity in itself is conditioned by something else, the latter must furnish an activity different from activity in itself.
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- (4) Therefore, activity in itself is not conditioned by something else.
- (5) Activity in itself is unconditioned.

Premise (1) just employs the law of the excluded middle. This brings us to premise (2). The principle of unconditioned activity has to do something for all conditions, and so all our inferences regarding them. We can test this. Counterfactually, if the presupposition of the unconditioned is removed—perhaps we say rendered wholly inactive—in any dependence relation, the thing in question should no longer be conditioned. Maybe this is a grammatical point. Something must be *happening*, and so active, for something to be conditioned by something else. If you do not like the language of conditionality, reconstrue matters in terms of ontic priority. How does it make sense to say something is prior to something else without involving an activity or a happening? For all the fuss that might be made over Schelling’s mystical appeals to the sempiternal, I think he is right to assert that dependence relations (conditioning, conferring, realizing, causing, etc.) require ongoing application. That is, conditions can be time-bound or even world-bound, if you are partial to that kind of reasoning. Such conditions apply in some instances and not in others—save for necessities, which unconditioned activity is supposed to be. Separately, we might also push back against the demand in (2) that a condition require an activity different from what it conditions. But if it did not, how can

we say the condition is doing any work on the conditioned, which is something different from the condition? It does not appear we can.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, affirming the antecedent of premise (3) would amount to a contradiction. Activity in itself cannot be conditioned by something else precisely because if we grant (2), we would have to assume a different activity from a different condition. But that would contradict the meaning of ‘*per se*’ or ‘in itself.’ So, it makes no sense to say that it could depend on something else.

With this basic argument now before us, what are the consequences of this position *vis-à-vis* the classic question of Schelling’s commitments to physicalism or materialism?<sup>17</sup> Here, I open the door to this question and keep it ajar just long enough to carry through with teasing out this chapter’s aim regarding a theory of causation rather than one focused on substance. I will only have all the necessary tools available to adequately address the latter concern in the final chapter. Now, part of this question is quickly answered: when Schelling is doing transcendental philosophy proper, he is obviously not a physicalist. Of course, even then there is the difficulty of identifying where he is actually doing transcendental philosophy, but I set this aside.

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<sup>16</sup> Audi articulates this point in relation to realization: “Let us assume that realization is asymmetrical, so that *F*’s realizing *G* entails that  $F \neq G$ .” Substitute ‘realizing’ for the broader notion of conditioning, where both are activities (the former more specified than the latter) and therefore happenings (again, in an aspecific sense), and I think the point is clear. See Audi, “Properties, Powers, and the Subset Account of Realization,” 655.

<sup>17</sup> I treat the terms synonymously, but primarily from the standpoint of contemporary physicalism. In the Schelling-specific literature on the question, the issue is often addressed from the tradition of materialism *à la* (Marxist) dialectical/historical materialism, which treats as relevant a sweeping host of topics, e.g., atheism, political economy, human sociality, etc. that contemporary ‘analytic’ physicalists would find at a minimum more or less orthogonal to the central thesis. I set these important issues aside and confine myself to the more rigid notion of physicalism.

In some of the literature on Schelling where this question of Schelling's physicalism is directly addressed, the investigation finds its way by means of gestures: "lines," "remnants," "moments," "possibilities," "beginnings," and so forth, of materialism in Schelling.<sup>18</sup> Sometimes, it is said, there are "crypto-materialist" elements in his work, a "secret materialism."<sup>19</sup> And to be fair, different versions of Schelling do offer us different outlooks on the nature of materiality and the question of what to make of it.

Nonetheless, in this literature the prevailing thought deals with the manners in which one can follow the currents in Schelling's writing where he is concerned with the "outer," the external world in some sense, having predominance over the "inner," the world of the mental, or better yet of the subject. Contrasts are drawn between the explanatory power of Schelling's admittedly overly universalized pantheistic renditions of nature, his flights of fancy, his deferrals and failures of clarification regarding broadly physical phenomena, and other thinkers' stricter, more contemporary, concrete, scientific, historical and/or socio-economic accounts. Evidence offered of explicit criteria as to what constitutes physicalism seems otherwise thin. The issue basically comes down to identifying areas in Schelling's corpus where he simply takes the existence of matter seriously. However, it is not clear to me that this is so much a test for physicalist tendencies as it is for psychotic ones.

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<sup>18</sup> See Černý, "Von der natura naturans zum »unvordenklichen Seyn« Eine Linie des Materialismus bei Schelling?," 127 – 144.

<sup>19</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, "Dialektischer Idealismus im Übergang zum Materialismus – Geschichtsphilosophische Folgerungen aus Schellings Idee einer Contraction Gottes," in *Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 172 – 227.

In truth, much of the question hinges on the definition of our terms. If, as I have already stated, physicalism is the thesis that all facts are physical facts, we must ask: what constitutes a physical fact? In the most straightforward sense, Schelling would reject the assertion that unconditioned activity is a physical fact. After all, it is, he says, neither an individual thing nor ‘is.’ Rather, it is a principle, a necessary condition of all facthood as well as of all physicality.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, in his early 1795 essay (republished in 1809) “Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy,” Schelling actually distinguishes his unconditioned principle from facts as such—physical or not.<sup>21</sup>

However, the situation might not be so straightforward. For one, physicalists do not necessarily have to reject principles that condition our understanding of the physical. After all, physical laws can be construed this way. And besides this, in some of the research in the contemporary philosophy of mind, physicalism is sometimes spoken of in terms of a would-be or ideal physics. That is, physicalism by this standard is whatever a so-called completed physics to come defines as falling within the scope of physical facts. This does not mean, however, that we may envision a physics so radically different as to be unanticipatable and incomprehensible, thereby rendering the basic consideration of a future physics and its relation to definitions of the physical senseless. The suggestion is just that there may be some matters physics is currently leaving out at the ground level.

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<sup>20</sup> This distinction might lead one to wonder what truth is for Schelling. At least in the philosophy of identity period, Schelling will say that truth is not a matter of correspondence. He will go on to say that truths are only grasped when seeing particular facts in connection to the unconditioned identity of the absolute. What that looks like is admittedly not clearly specified. With that said, the point at least is that facts and principles of ontology are not at a remove from one another for Schelling. See the Chapter 6 for a brief discussion of this as well as Schelling’s discussion of construction in the prior chapter.

<sup>21</sup> “It was customary to presuppose—to be sure, rashly—that the supreme principle of all philosophy must express a *fact*. . . . in line with linguistic usage, one understood fact to mean something that was outside the sphere of the pure, absolute I (and therefore inside the sphere of the conditional).” See Schelling, “Of the I,” 78; *SW*, I, 172.

Such a claim is not antithetical to how Schelling thinks of his own work on reconceiving the foundations of the natural sciences. Schelling's project of *Naturphilosophie* hinges on the belief that an improved physics, and more importantly an improved system of the sciences, depends on this notion of unconditionality (and more, to be sure) to unite and give shape to claims of systematicity.<sup>22</sup> Unconditionality is what it is by virtue of its ability to begin to render the notion of system in the first place intelligible. Nevertheless, in making such a claim, it is clear Schelling does not have in mind throwing all empirical research out but rather re-envisioning the ways we can understand what is already available to us.

Even so, when we examine what this caveat of completed physics would entail, we return to the original question of definitions of what is really physical. For instance, David Chalmers argues:

There is one appeal to a “complete physics” that should be taken seriously. This is the idea that current physics characterizes its underlying properties (such as mass and charge) in terms of abstract structures and relations, but it leaves open their intrinsic natures. On this view, a complete physical description of the world must also characterize the intrinsic properties that ground these structures and relations; and once such intrinsic properties are invoked, physics will go beyond structure and dynamics[.]<sup>23</sup>

Chalmers goes on to specify the perspectives in which the concept of intrinsic natures can be seen as physical or as something more neutral.<sup>24</sup> So, taking this route leaves the

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<sup>22</sup> Schelling says in the *First Outline*, “Empiricism extended to include unconditionedness is precisely philosophy of nature.” Schelling, *First Outline*, 22; *SW*, III, 24.

<sup>23</sup> David Chalmers, “Consciousness and its Place in Nature,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind*, ed., Stephen P. Stich and Ted A. Warfield, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 121.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 130 – 131.

question somewhat open.<sup>25</sup> Just what intrinsic properties are is not relevant to the issues at hand, but this idea is more or less what Schelling will go on to critique in his *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*. Nonetheless, he will also argue for an adjacent, qualified concept of intrinsic properties in his *First Outline*. This will amount to a theory he titles dynamic atomism, however this theory itself is abandoned by Schelling quickly.<sup>26</sup> These issues I will further explore in the fifth and sixth chapters and certainly will offer insight into just where Schelling stands on the topic of substance, intrinsic properties, explanatory gaps, qualia, and the like. For now, it suffices to say that Schelling's vision of ontology and materiality begins with unconditioned activity.<sup>27</sup>

When Schelling returns his focus to issues of transcendental philosophy in 1800's *System*, he will raise the question of the existential status or the reality of his unconditioned principle, contrasting it with the status of things. Though Schelling speaks here in the register of "the absolute self" or I (*das absolute Ich*) as his principle (which by

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<sup>25</sup> Michael N. Forester sees Schelling's earlier position in 1801 as "a form of neutral monism." See Michael N. Forester, "Schelling and skepticism," 38.

Manfred Frank describes an aspect of Schelling as offering "an ontologically neutral (that is neither materialist nor idealist) mind-body theory." See Manfred Frank, "'Identity of identity and non-identity': Schelling's path to the 'absolute system of identity'," in *Interpreting Schelling*, ed., Lara Ostaric, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 143.

Again, however, neither of these comments flesh out what the criteria are for such neutrality.

<sup>26</sup> See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> Another question to consider is just how important definitions of physicalism are to Schelling's naturalist and empiricist sympathies. This itself deserves a study on its own. The influence of figures like Kant, Herder, Leibniz and Spinoza on Schelling suggest a picture where matter as real is not really the main character when it comes its role in the sciences and naturalism. Kant's dynamic forces, Herder's own notion of force, Leibniz's formal atoms as original activities, and Spinoza's *natura naturans* all imply that matter is not all that interesting and central a candidate in understanding the natural world for these thinkers as well as perhaps for Schelling.



now should be clear is just one development of his broader principle), his reasoning still applies to our inquiry:

The dilemma proposed in answer to this, that everything must be either something or nothing, etc., is based on an ambiguity in the concept of ‘something’. If ‘*something*’ is without exception to mean something *real*, in contrast to the merely *imaginary*, then the self [das Ich] must certainly be something real, since it is the *principle* of all reality. But it is equally clear that, just because it is the *principle* of all reality, it cannot be real in the same sense as that which enjoys a merely derivative reality. The reality taken by our critics to be the only true one, that of things, is simply borrowed, and merely a reflection of the higher reality in question. —Seen in its true light, the dilemma thus amounts to this: everything is either a *thing* or nothing; which can straightway be seen to be false, since there is assuredly a higher concept than that of a thing, namely the concept of *doing*, or *activity*. This concept must certainly be higher than that of a thing, since things themselves [*die Dinge selbst*] are to be understood merely as modifications of an activity limited in various ways.<sup>28</sup>

But if activity is a concept higher than that of a thing, and if things reduce to (or are derivative of) modifications of activity rather than activities reducing to things, then standard models of reduction get turned topsy-turvy. Activity, in other words, is prior, and is our central ontological building block. But this will make for a subtle problem for any project of physicalist reductionism (remember: the aim of the chapter is to locate an opening to render mental causes potentially intelligible). This will be because all attempts to bottom out causal explanations, to find the work being done exclusively by the physical, will fail. And all such explanations will possess a gap, a lacuna. But, as I will argue in the third section, this is precisely what we’re after.

## II. Hypothetical Objections to an Anhypothetical

At this juncture I would like to consider some larger objections to the Argument for Unconditioned Activity before finally turning to a specific analysis of its relation to

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<sup>28</sup> Schelling, *System*, 32; *SW*, III, 375.

causation. Here I entertain three hypothetical objections, moving from the most extreme rejection of the argument to the least extreme. The first objection rejects the ontological notion of activity wholesale. The second objection rejects the generality of the notion. The third objection grants the generality, but insists it is epiphenomenal.

The idea that an all-encompassing ontological activity (or something within this vicinity) is nothing new to philosophy, nothing unique to Schelling. Likewise, however, famous paradoxes have been formulated for arguments to the contrary. We need only call to mind the host of contradictions in Plato's *Parmenides* or Zeno's historical arguments against the existence of motion to see how similar issues may arise in relation to our own argument.<sup>29</sup> Consider the following extreme objection.

Just as one might argue in favor of absolute activity, one can very well argue for absolute inactivity. Perhaps one defines inactivity in itself as the notion of nonoccurrence *per se*. Furthermore, one might say that in order for something to be active, it must first be inactive. That is, if something is to be happening, it must first be not happening. Do not all things have a beginning? So, if activity in itself is happening, it must first be not happening. But if it first does not happen, activity in itself never happens, for otherwise we are begging the question. Thus, what is truly absolute is absolute inactivity, not activity.

In his series of commentaries *On Aristotle Physics*, Simplicius recounts a story of Diogenes who, upon hearing someone rehearse a Zeno-style argument that motion did not exist, stood up and walked away. “[I]n matters of where we have self-warranting knowledge,” Simplicius notes, “there is no need of logical subtlety. The kind of person

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<sup>29</sup> See Aristotle, *Physics*, Book VI, especially pt. 9.

[who thinks there is] is not even aware . . . of the criteria appropriate to [different] realities (*pragmata*).”<sup>30</sup> Though we might accuse Diogenes of not tracking the faults in premises prior to the conclusion, of himself assuming what is at issue by moving anyway, we may say the same of our advocate for absolute inactivity. It is one who argues against absolute activity who presupposes it. For in order to make an argument that activity in itself does not exist, one must first engage in an activity.

This leads us to an Aristotelian point discussed by Quentin Meillassoux. Activity in itself is a non- or an anhypothetical principle, which Aristotle discussed with respect to the principle of non-contradiction. Such a principle requires not a deduction, but proceeds refutationally, whereby “anyone who contests it can do so only by presupposing it to be true, thereby refuting him or herself.”<sup>31</sup> Schelling seems to have as much in mind when in 1794’s “On the Possibility of a Form of All Philosophy” he writes that

the first criterion found in the concept of an absolutely unconditional proposition shows of itself the quite different way in which it must be sought. For such a proposition can be given only by its own criteria. . . . All other criteria which one might attribute to it would either contradict this criterion or be already contained in it.<sup>32</sup>

In this way, there is a bit of trickery involved in offering forth a premise-by-premise argument in favor of absolute activity since even in attempting one, just like our objector, we presuppose its truth.

Nonetheless, one might push back against the claim that what has been demonstrated is an anhypothetical principle of *absolute* activity. When presupposing

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<sup>30</sup> Simplicius, *On Aristotle Physics 8.1 – 5*, trans., István Bodnár, Michael Chase, and Michael Share (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 111.

<sup>31</sup> Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 60 – 61.

<sup>32</sup> Schelling, “Of the Possibility,” 44; *SW*, I, 96.

activity in order to make the argument for or against absolute activity, one might reply that I am conflating different forms of activity. That is, the activity needed for mounting an argument is not a confirming instance of any absolute or in itself. Presupposing activity is just presupposing an activity of thought, and a specific one at that. So, although our objector might admit to assuming an activity when attempting to refute us, they still may say that such an activity says nothing about the status of an absolute or of anything ontologically prior.

This brings us to the second objection I would like to consider: that activity is spoken of in many ways. The objection here does not deny that there are activities of the world, only that there is no meaningful ontological generality that connects them all together. That is, there are very different kinds of activity, potentially so different from one another as to share no common ground. For instance, a particular millet seed in a pile (partly) conditions the shape of the whole, but this conditioning relation is in no way the same activity as, say, a billiard ball striking another. One might argue these activities belong in totally different categories.

So what? Schelling was never denying that there are different categories of activities. Still, the deeper issue is in the implication that these activities are *so* different that even describing them in itself is a disservice to our understanding of their underlying distinctions. The problem becomes how such categories are united in our understanding as well as differentiated. If they are so different as to have nothing in common, the issue starts to look a lot like the one Descartes ran into between substances. How would these radically different categories interact? They appear to in critical ways. For instance, modal conditions seem to be inextricably tied in with causal conditions.

Of course, the issue can cut the other way. If everything is united by activity, how is anything in the first place meaningfully differentiable? Some of this answer involves the long-standing issue of Schelling's views on the duplicity of the absolute and just how identity and difference allegedly intermingle as discussed in the prior chapter. It is admittedly not always clear Schelling has a good response to this question of differentiation.

However, what should now be clarified is what it means to say that "everything is united by absolute activity." When considering a specific activity, it is not that what is really happening is some mysterious absolute pulling all the strings or doing all the work, rather than something more particular. This cannot be stressed enough. Again, Schelling is not denying that we only adequately explain states of affairs by specifying the right conditions and therefore the right activities for them. In fact, in a striking passage in 1798's *On the World-Soul*, in which Schelling spontaneously breaks into the first-person and in a rare instance of his use of the word 'hate,' Schelling writes: "I hate nothing more than the mindless striving to eliminate the multiplicity of natural causes through fictitious identities. I observe that nature is satisfied only by the greatest dominion of forms."<sup>33</sup> It is just that ontic activities are sufficient only insofar as they ontologically presuppose a notion itself unconditioned, which has no further explanation. Despite standing in dependence relations, all conditioned activities somehow carry a trace of this unconditionality because this is where we locate the ground level in the chain of adequate explanation. That activities appear in no need for such a principle is only in the fact that

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<sup>33</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "On the World-Soul: An Hypothesis of Higher Physics for Explaining Universal Organism" (excerpt), trans., Iain Hamilton Grant, in *Collapse*, vol. VI, (January 2010); 68; *SW*, II, 348.

they presuppose it unknowingly (call to mind the notion of intellectual illusion). I will come back to this claim in the next section.

There is still an issue raised earlier that has been left unaddressed. Even if we grant that the specificity of activity depends first on a more generalized activity, it might be argued that this activity is nothing other than the activity of thought. This potentially leads us to a subjectivist idealist position, which brings us within the vicinity of a less desirable variation of Schelling's earlier position—less desirable because we do not really want to argue in favor of an absolute subject, do we? The issue is this. What if in fact the activity we speak of so grandly as absolute is only an anhypothetical principle *for us* rather than *in itself*? Just because we have yet to specify this or disambiguate its sense does not rule out this possibility. How do we know that all activity presupposed in our thinking is not just the activity of the absolute subject?

This is a challenge Schelling himself struggled with. The easy response is that in order to qualify absolute activity is already to condition it. That there is at all a possibility to subjectivize the absolute, to append the I, is one conditioned by tacitly presupposing bare, absolute activity, which allows one to posit this state of affairs in the first place. Again, this is an issue of priority. This is a point I tried to articulate in the prior chapter. In my critique of Schelling's 1800 *System* and my analysis of the notion of ontological negativity extracted therefrom, part of the takeaway was that Schelling himself failed to fully grasp the bind he was in when detailing the objectifying and alienating power of subjectivity caught in its iterations of self-reflection. Each ascent to higher levels of reflection, each new analysis acts only to collapse the difference between the subject intuiting and the object intuited, rendering it nothing but the latter. And as I concluded

there, Schelling's deferral of the issue by declaring the "I" the postulate of his system, however, never really resolves the problem.

To give Schelling his due, however, what the I is for him is so stripped down that just what counts as absolute subjectivity as opposed to bare absoluteness depends on a very thin difference, albeit one he certainly reads too much into at times. Other times, the two are indistinguishable from one another. As already discussed, moving into his *Identitätssystem* with 1801's "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," Schelling's thesis revolves around being at last resolute regarding the non-subjective status of the absolute. The I for him will turn into a result of a greater absolute, which he will refer to as absolute reason.

Such an assertion presents us with yet another line of frustrating inconsistency within his thinking and with it a new set of interpretive troubles. I only bring it up here because it will be relevant to the final section. For one, the language of activity drops out in his 1801 "Presentation." Furthermore, it seems as if declaring reason absolute is to do nothing other than subjectivize the absolute. For to reason about things is to have attitudes and beliefs about them. This requires a subject, someone capable of intentionality, which objects in our everyday understanding do not possess.

This question of absolute reason is not unique to Schelling but rather marks a central complexity in the framework of philosophy that falls under the heading of post-Kantian German idealism. The answer to it is not easy, least of all because Schelling does not develop this insight in a satisfactory way. Moreover, there is no time to properly treat of this far-reaching issue here. What can be answered easily, however, is that when Schelling speaks of absolute reason as unconditioned principle, reason here is not really

meant in the sense of ‘giving reasons’ as we understand it normally (or these days) just as nature as subject does not mean nature is everywhere a thinking subject. Absolute reason is more the notion of what it takes, that is, what must be presupposed, for any state of affairs to possibly ‘match up’ with our understanding of and thinking on them. The desired consequence is that what qualifies epistemically as having the right understanding of so-and-so is no different from what so-and-so is ontologically. One of the big problems with Schelling is that he sometimes mistakes the principle of this approach—again, the thesis or *idea* that reasons can match up with actual states of affairs—for what doing the concrete work of articulating the outcome would look like—the night in which all cows are black. So, absolute reason as principle is conflated with absolute reason as outcome.

Though this chapter is concerned more with the Schellingian notion of absolute activity than Schelling *per se*, part of the basic interpretive issue can be pushed aside by suggesting an underlying equivalence. The plot twist is simple: absolute reason *qua* principle is absolute activity, albeit articulated in what might be seen as two different registers, epistemic and ontological. Remember that for Kant, the very motivation to seek the unconditioned was one grounded in the ambitions of reason. Schelling’s claim now becomes that it is the activity of reason that unites our inferences, navigates the space of conditions, of premises and of conclusions. This binding force is just the active spirit of reason, which connects all dots but just as well divides, destroys, and disambiguates them, and which articulates itself in so doing. This last point is not spooky when interpreted correctly. For to specify, to particularize, and so to understand the activities of



the world will mean to reason about them. But if all of these acts presuppose absolute activity in being derivative of it, then such acts are of (or for) itself.

There is, though, another subterranean consequence to such a view that I will only note for now, but which Schelling himself will not attempt to articulate until his later works starting with 1804's *Philosophy and Religion* and more importantly 1809's *Freiheitsschrift*. Absolute reason, as that which is yet to be specified, is also that which therefore lacks reasons, is ungrounded in its grounding force. Schelling first attempts to express this understanding of the principle of absoluteness, albeit in nascent form, as one of absolute indifference, a brute aspecificity. Consequently, for the Schelling of 1801, it is a mistake to call absolute reason a subjective absolute. In the first place it is precisely non-subjective but just as well non-objective:

Reason's thought is foreign to everyone; to conceive it as absolute, and thus to come to the standpoint I require, one must abstract from what does the thinking. For the one who performs this abstraction reason immediately ceases to be something subjective, as most people imagine it. It can of course no longer be conceived as something objective either, since an objective something or a thought item [*Gedachtes*] becomes possible only in contrast to a thinking something, from which there is complete abstraction here. Reason, therefore, becomes the true *in-itself* through this abstraction, which is located precisely in the indifference-point of the subjective and the objective.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, this is not the full picture, nor is it an adequate explanation of what Schelling is up to. But I will now set this aside.

I turn now to one final objection. I will only frame the problem here since to try to answer all of it will take up much of the next section. Suppose that we admit that there is indeed a trap of absolute activity whereby all happenings involve unconditionality in the anemic sense I am suggesting. The trial we must now undergo demands that we defend

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<sup>34</sup> Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," 349; *SW*, IV, 114 – 115.

absolute activity and show that it is actually doing necessary work. Here our objector claims that we are mobilizing a generality that washes away all the particularity that actually carries out the various undertakings and happenings in the world.

Since we are ultimately concerned with causation, the rebuttal to our conception may be narrowed as follows. Causal conditions are not conditions by virtue of some absolute activity, but precisely because of specific properties that allow events or happenings to be sufficiently explained by virtue of those properties at all. Just because some blank generality appends itself to every condition, every statement, every observation, and every inference, thus making a nuisance of itself, does not mean it does anything. That activity exists and is responsible for any particular causal event is only due to the fact that the notion trivially generalizes over real causal properties yet to be articulated that undertake the actual causal labor, which, worse than being epiphenomenal, this bourgeois conception stealthily appropriates with numbered phrases and sophistry.

### **III. To Be Determined: On the Determinable/Determinate Distinction, Activity and Causation**

Let us now turn our attention to this issue of causation. At this stage, it seems easy to see how causation gets implicated in Schelling's principle—activity is happening as such, causes require happenings, so the two go hand in hand. However, if our objector above is correct, even if these notions pair up, what makes the difference is the way in which they do so. What I want to say now is that activity in itself is neither a trivial generality nor something that competes with more exacting causal explanations. To show this, I will first specify their connection, contending that activity in itself stands to causation in a

special kind of determinable/determinate relation.<sup>35</sup> In doing so, I hope to draw out a unique repercussion of this position. Namely, that causality according to this model has a lacunary character to it. Finally, I will briefly discuss how this gap manifests itself and so perhaps aids us in another potential determinable/determinate relation: that between the mental and the physical.

The distinction between determinable and determinate can be taken as a relative relation of specification. Following Stephen Yablo, we can say, for example, that red is a determinate of the determinable colored, but we can just as well say that scarlet is a determinate of the determinable red. Yablo captures this relation with the following guiding principle:

- ( $\Delta$ )  $P$  determines  $Q$  ( $P > Q$ ) only if:  
(i) necessarily, for all  $x$ , if  $x$  has  $P$  then  $x$  has  $Q$ ; and  
(ii) possibly, for some  $x$ ,  $x$  has  $Q$  but lacks  $P$ .<sup>36</sup>

Plugging in the notion of activity in itself as  $Q$  and the notion of causation  $P$ , the notion of causation determines (again, in the sense of specifies) activity in itself. Further, for all events  $x$ , if  $x$  has the notion of causation then the event has activity in itself. But, some events  $x$  can still have activity in itself without it being a causal event. As discussed earlier, activity in itself concerns states of affairs beyond causation. So far, the shoe fits.

Of course, one should argue that this does not yet mean that activity in itself, being so broadly defined, actually does any causal work. Yablo's famous example of Sophie the pigeon can help us test this claim. Sophie is trained to peck at red things and

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<sup>35</sup> See Stephen Yablo, "Mental Causation," in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 2, (April 1992), 245 – 280.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

only red things. Indeed, when presented with a scarlet object, she still pecks as scarlet is a determinate of the determinable red. Setting aside the complexities of his conceptual engineering, what Yablo establishes is that the determinable red does not in fact compete with the determinate scarlet in bringing about the effect of Sophie's pecking behavior. In fact, the determinable red might be sufficient as is, and even serve as the better causal explanation in contrast to the more specific determinate scarlet, which possesses properties unnecessary and so causally irrelevant in eliciting a pecking response. Nevertheless, it is not enough simply to stand in a determinable/determinate relation, for Sophie will not peck at blue objects simply because being colored is a determinable that relates to both red and blue as determinates.

Likewise, with activity in itself we might argue that the same issue applies. As in the case of being colored, activity in itself is not enough to bring about pecking behavior in Sophie because it is too broad and fails to carry with it the relevant causal properties that red does in relation to scarlet. In other words, the work is done by more specific properties that belong to more specific determinates and determinables. But nobody is denying this. Like being colored, activity in itself is only here being claimed to be a relevant condition of all causation because to be a cause is just to be a very specific determinate of activity in itself. And since a determinate is neither in causal competition nor is causally irrelevant in relation its determinable, we can say, *contra* our objector, that activity in itself does work, albeit insufficiently.

On its own, the determinable/determinate distinction spells trouble for at least a particularly venomous brand of reductionism. For Yablo, the main objective is to show how the mental *qua* determinable finds its determinates in the physical, with the former

still counting as a sufficient cause and so as actually doing work. The idea is for him that attempts to radically reduce causal explanations, to exclude anything remotely beyond strict sufficiency in our explanations, to arrive at what-*really*-does-the-causal-work, appears to introduce more and more irrelevancies with each movement from a particular determinable to an even more particular physical determinate.

To illustrate this point, consider the following example. A building said to withstand only earthquakes that register below five on the Richter scale will collapse when encountering an earthquake at five or over. But this building will just as well collapse in relation to the more determinate earthquake that registers greater than or equal to five but less than six. In such an event, the latter causal explanation possesses extraneous details, which, though a more determinate explanation, adds no value in explaining the building's structural demise. What matters to such an explanation is simply that the earthquake registered at five or above.

Most importantly, however, any added detail fails to render the less detailed determinable causally irrelevant anyway. As far as causal sufficiency and relevance is concerned, Yablo suggests, capturing just the right amount of detail is what matters: "So any ultimate determinate seems likely to incorporate causally extraneous detail. But then, abstracting some or all of this detail away should leave a determinable which, since it falls short of the original only in irrelevant respects, is no less sufficient for the effect."<sup>37</sup> So, a reductionist project that aims to arrive at what Yablo calls "ultimate determinates," the "causally idle upper bound" of explanation, assuming there is such a thing, is not

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 258.

needed, and in fact may be so hyper-specific as to bring in a great deal of irrelevant causal properties depending on how matters are described.

This is not yet the full picture, however. If the argument I have developed about activity in itself holds water, this determinable has a characteristic other more mundane, ontic determinables such as being colored do not. The former, recall, is claimed to possess a special status to it, namely that of ontological priority. We might say that activity in itself is an unconditioned determinable. This, I believe, lends some ontological force in mobilizing the determinable/determinate distinction—which might otherwise be seen merely as a grandiose display of conceptual gymnastics—against physicalist reductionism about causation.

Whereas other determinables can be claimed to bottom out by being instantiated in their physical determinates, activity in itself uniquely and silently cuts in the other direction as well. That is, while we might grant that the determinates of activity in itself find their instantiation in the physical, there is nonetheless what Schelling might call an indivisible remainder to it that evades total explanatory capture in that we must presuppose the notion in a manner we need not with ontic determinables. Even though red is a determinate of the determinable colored, both of these notions are just as well abstractions of a further determinate of a particular perceptible wavelength.

In appealing to Yablo's principle ( $\Delta$ ) that renders the less specific abstraction a sufficient and non-competitive explanation, the conceptual apparatus utilized always implicitly relies on a physical specification. The same goes for determinates of activity in itself, except for activity in itself, for it is neither merely an abstraction of the physical, nor is it a determinate of anything else. The difference is subtle in that the latter finds no

true analog. While the determinable/determinate distinction is spoken of in relative terms, with activity in itself the order of explanation stops in that it is absolute. It instead furnishes what we might call the lower bound of all explanation, which, in so many words, is just to reiterate that it is unconditioned. What does this do for us?

Though Yablo does not frame matters this way, what I now wish to assert is that such a need for abstraction implies that the demand for absolute specificity fails with respect to approaches to causation. In the words of Schelling, with nature we must contend with a surplus (*Uebergewicht*) of the real.<sup>38</sup> To do so, all explanation must be shot through with the generality of concepts. But mere conceptual mediation is not enough without an ontological guarantor that such concepts actually apply to the world they claim to capture. Such a principle must be the glue that binds the two together and gives credence to the lofty claims of adequate explanation. Activity in itself, as such a principle, functions as this guarantor, but in operating as the lower bound of explanation that just is so *qua* unconditioned, it thereby passes on an incomprehensible, free-floating quality that all explanation inherits. And since such relations are one of determinable to determinate, no explanation can compete with or wash itself clean of it. “The understanding is born in the genuine sense from that which is without understanding,” Schelling says.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “The power that bursts forth in the stuff of nature is the same in essence as that which displays itself in the world of mind, except that it has to contend there with a surplus of the real [*Uebergewicht des Reellen*], here with one of the ideal. Yet even this opposition, which is not an opposition in essence, but in mere potency, appears as opposition only to one who finds himself outside indifference, who fails to view absolute identity itself as primary and original.” Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 358 – 359; *SW*, IV, 128.

<sup>39</sup> Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 66; *SW*, VII, 360.

Is this an explanatory mystification of happenings that wipes away any true claim to specificity? In one sense, yes. In another, no. But the two are not incompatible, and that makes all the difference. This is not a vulgar epistemic post-modernism. We still go about our business analyzing causes, events, and so forth, specifying and approximating physical determinates. None of what has been said should change this. It is just that there is an underlying element of ungroundedness that comes along free of charge, and which thereby haunts all determinates. Such a notion is both what opens the space and propels the movement of explanation. But, as a result, there is always wiggle-room so to speak, a lacuna, which allows us always to waver uncertainly between degrees of specificity and so demands of us that we confine such specificities within limits and temper them with abstractions, generalities that just so happen to do sufficient work.

All this, however, might not be enough for trafficking in the mental. There are different brands of reductionism that in one way or another can be described as granting a less robust version of Yablo's claim while rejecting the proposition that the mental as we normally wish to understand it does anything. This is because the idea that abstractions are spurned within the empirical sciences or find no employment in the enterprise of reduction is false. Examined carefully, what we see is that the dispute comes down to *where* we want to ultimately locate such abstractions.

For instance, in Patricia Churchland and Terrence Sejnoski's 1989 "Neural Representation and Neural Computation" the authors aptly describe a model of intertheoretical reduction of cognitive phenomena that is not what we would like to imagine the oft-caricatured, extreme strawman-form of reductionism to be. This is because such a model admits of various levels of domain-relative abstraction:



Very pure philosophers who cannot bring themselves to call these perfectly respectable domain-relative explanations “reductions” are really just digging in on who gets to use the word. Moreover, it should be emphasized that the explanation of high-level cognitive phenomena will not be achieved directly in terms of phenomena at the lowest level of nervous-system organization, such as synapses and individual neurons. Rather, the explanation will refer to properties at higher structural levels, such as networks or systems. Functional properties of networks and systems will be explained by reference to properties at the next level down, and so on. What we envision is a chain of explanations linking higher to next-lower levels, and so on down the ladder of structural levels. . . . Aspects of individual variation at the synaptic and cellular levels are probably invisible at the systems level[.]<sup>40</sup>

The point is that the language of abstraction, e.g., structural levels, organization, systems, dynamics, networks, maps, patterns of activity, etc., is not something so easily done away with and not incompatible with reductionist accounts. To be sure, the need for such abstractions arises by means of empirical work. Who can deny this? But this means that what reduces to what is something that does not so simply boil down to absolutely particularized physical determinates at the cost of everything else.

Nevertheless, while utilizing empirically postulated determinables (like levels) means for such reductionists that we do not need to bottom out in ultimate determinates once and for all, they also do not thereby concede that we must make room for even higher-level folk conceptions of the mental. The latter, it is claimed, is up to the empirical sciences to find out—but on one interpretation, that would seem to shift the bounds of where determinates and determinables can wander. But if these reductionists can lay claim to a ladder of systems, levels, dynamics, patterns, and so forth, where lower levels become evidently spoken of as invisible from certain higher-level standpoints, the cut-off

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<sup>40</sup> Patricia Churchland, and Terrence Sejnowski, “Neural Representation and Neural Computation,” in *Mind and Cognition: An Anthology*, eds., William G. Lycan, and Jesse J. Prinz, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 251.

point might not be so easily located, especially when whatever or whoever is doing this cutting off seems subject to not seeing things from certain standpoints. What if we keep climbing the ladder of abstraction and conclude more or less what is right before us—empirically, on one reading of the term—everyday?

Unexpectedly, in Brian Leiter and Alexander Miller's assessment of Yablo's work, the two claim to locate precisely where this cut-off is for the latter. In a twist of fate, the tacit Davidsonian commitments that motivate Yablo's framework, which seeks to avoid falling victim to physicalist reduction, might be precisely the means by which he succumbs to it. Leiter and Miller's assertion is that while the relata in a determination of something like red and scarlet fall within the same explanatory space, Yablo has not shown that the mental and physical do so as well. It could very well be that they belong to entirely different, even contradictory explanatory types:

The basic idea is this: the constitutive ideals which govern the applicability of mental and intentional predicates are *normative* and *holistic*, in the sense that the process of interpretation which they govern aims at a certain sort of *rational* intelligibility; however, the constitutive ideals which govern the application of purely physical predicates are not normative or holistic in this sense, since the intelligibility sought for is of a completely different nature. . . . The constitutive ideals which govern the applicability of determinates and determinables have to belong to the same explanatory space – in other words, *the process of attempting to satisfy them has to aim in each case at the same sort of intelligibility*. But the process of attempting to satisfy the constitutive ideals which govern the ascription of mental and physical predicates aims in each case at a *different* sort of intelligibility.<sup>41</sup>

Now, whether or not physical predicates and mental ones have the same standards of intelligibility for Yablo and *contra* Davidson does not matter for my purposes.

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<sup>41</sup> Brian Leiter, and Alexander Miller, "Closet Dualism and Mental Causation," in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 28, No.2, (June 1998), 177.

In fact, what makes Schelling's account of nature so interesting is the manner in which nature and mind can fall within the same frame of intelligibility. Much of this depends on his developing of the weak teleological commitments found in the second half of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*. Such an investigation would bring this chapter too far astray, but it stands to reason that perhaps the very intelligibility we like to think applies to the physical is not so easily immune to forms of intelligibility we like to believe have no place in physical explanations (recall Kant's blade of grass).<sup>42</sup> But by the same token, on Schelling's account, the very intelligibility we like to think applies to the mental is not so easily immune to forms of (un)intelligibility we like to believe have no place in psychological explanations. If you want to talk about the constitutive ideal of rationality for Schelling, you must also bring in brute irrationality—even with nature. There is no ultimate split or separation in forms of intelligibility for Schelling. That does not mean, however, that there is not a constant struggle between ways in which we comprehend the world, only that he wants such competing perspectives, as a feature, to be grounded in the very principle under discussion.

And no discussion of Schelling on causation would be complete without noting that Schelling is not an interactionist about the mental and the physical. And it is precisely for the reasons just discussed. Mental and physical are not ultimately split for him, at least under his brand of monism found in the *Identitätssystem*: “*Between the real and the ideal, between being and thinking, no causal connection is possible, or thinking*

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<sup>42</sup> “[I]ndeed this is so certain that we can boldly say that it would be absurd for humans even to make such an attempt or to hope that there may yet arise a Newton who could make comprehensible even the generation of a blade of grass according to natural laws that no intention has ordered; rather, we must absolutely deny this insight to human beings.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, trans. Paul Guyer, and Eric Matthews, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 271; 5:400.

can never be the cause of a determination in being, or, in turn, being can never be the cause of a determination in thinking. - For the real and the ideal are only different views of one and the same substance.”<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Schelling grants that lower-level explanations leave out this qualification of the identity of real and ideal, physical and mental from the standpoint of the absolute. For we need not constantly reference activity as such or what have you in ordinary causal explanations. It is just that the course of such explanations runs the possibility of giving off the wrong picture of things. And this is why we may always fall victim to intellectual illusions. This is where the work of his philosophy comes in, with the determinable/determinate distinction securing a non-competitive place for the absolute at the level of explanation.

Regardless, for all the talk about blank generalities and the demands of the empirical, it seems to me such standards are mistaken the moment they leave out the mental or try to separate it from the world. For what could in fact be more particular, more amendable to empirical investigation, more demanding of scrutiny than every tic, every gesture, every parapraxis, every desire, every word of the individual? The total picture that emerges in each person, the absolute particularity we claimed to seek, in the end is captured by something we might say is at once the ultimate determinate in its specificity and obstinately determinable in its generality, what Schelling calls and what we can only call one’s *personality*. But like all matters for Schelling, this notion extends beyond persons, and above all to the whole character of nature, to what he calls God, but never mind that.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schelling, “Würzburg Lectures,” §270; *SW*, VI, 500 – 501. My translation.

<sup>44</sup> “But we have explained God as a living unity of forces; and if personality [*Persönlichkeit*] is founded, according to our previous explanation, on the connection between a self-determining [*selbständig*] being

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and a basis independent of him, then, similarly, because both of these completely saturate the other and are but one being, God is the highest personality through the connection of the ideal principle in him with the (relative to it) independent ground, since basis and things existing in him necessarily unify themselves in one absolute existence; or also, if the living unity of both is spirit, then, as their absolute bond, God is spirit in the eminent and absolute understanding.” Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, 59; *SW*, VII, 394 – 396.

## Chapter 5: Becoming Empirical – On Schelling’s Early Theory of Quality and Its Application to the Knowledge and Explanatory Gap Arguments for Qualia

It says: “In the beginning was the *Word*.”  
Already I am stopped. It seems absurd.  
The *Word* does not deserve the highest prize,  
I must translate it otherwise  
If I am well inspired and not dense  
It says: In the beginning was there *Sense*.  
Ponder that first line, wait and see,  
Lest you should write too hastily.  
Is sense the all-creating source?  
It ought to say: In the beginning there was *Force*.  
Yet something warns me as I grasp the pen,  
That my translation must be changed again.  
The spirit helps me. Now it is exact.  
I write: In the beginning was the *Act*.

—Goethe, *Faust*<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I explore Schelling’s early theory of quality—a theory regarding what may now fall under the various headings of phenomenal qualities, qualia, presentation, sense,

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<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans., Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 153; 1224 – 1237. Translation modified.

Kaufmann translates the German “*Sinn*” as “Mind” instead of “Sense,” rhyming the former with “blind.” I have modified the translation opting to use “Sense,” pairing it with “dense” to preserve the scheme. “Sense” is both a more direct translation and conveniently matches the discussion of the chapter. Below is the original stanza:

Geschrieben steht: «Im Anfang war das Wort!»  
Hier stock ich schon! Wer hilft mir weiter fort?  
Ich kann das Wort so hoch unmöglich schätzen,  
Ich muß es anders übersetzen,  
Wenn ich vom Geiste recht erleuchtet bin.  
Geschrieben steht: Im Anfang war der *Sinn*.  
Bedenke wohl die erste Zeile,  
Daß deine Feder sich nicht übereile!  
Ist es der *Sinn*, der alles wirkt und schafft?  
Es sollte stehn: Im Anfang war die *Kraft*!  
Doch, auch indem ich dieses niederschreibe,  
Schon warnt mich was, daß ich dabei nicht bleibe.  
Mir hilft der Geist! Auf einmal seh ich Rat  
Und schreibe getrost: Im Anfang war die *Tat*!

and so forth. In doing so, I then apply his thinking to two central issues concerning quality in the contemporary philosophy of mind, namely the knowledge argument for qualia and the explanatory gap problem.

In the first section, I focus primarily on Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, which was originally published in 1797 but republished with revisions and substantial supplements in 1803. This text is notable not only because we find an extensive treatment of his thinking on quality, but also because of the insight we gain from the text's revisions. Regarding the former, one of Schelling's aims in the book is to explore how quality and its relation to sensory experience can be made scientifically legitimate. Regarding the latter, the text allows us to follow the development of Schelling's views starting with his transcendental idealist inflected *Naturphilosophie* to the latter's integration into the realist monist project of his *Identitätsphilosophie* period. Though Schelling's theory of quality alters multiple times in the period between the text's original publication and republication, major elements of his thinking on quality remain. And while there are important differences between versions of this text, the republication of the *Ideas* at least allows us partly to anchor ourselves theoretically to a period of Schelling's early thought notorious for its alterations. Such proteanism, so often noted, is rarely brought up in relation to Schelling's empiricist sympathies on display in the *Ideas*. I show how Schelling's defense of the empirical results from his theory of quality. A central thesis of his view, I argue, is the epistemological claim that first-person sensory experience is a necessary condition of some forms of empirical knowledge.

In the second section, I briefly explore the insights and shortcomings of this thesis. I critique the ontological conclusions about substance that he attempts to draw

from his epistemological position about the nature quality and experience. I then suggest instead an alternative, non-metaphysical explanation compatible with the spirit of Schelling's thinking. My thesis is that Schelling is correct to suggest that first-person experiences of qualities can uniquely justify certain epistemic claims. It is just that this on its own does not give grounds for Schelling to conclude that such experiences necessitate any ontological implications about the fundamental nature of substance. In the third section, I return to exploring Schelling's theory of qualities and go on to review Schelling's metaphysics of substance, which he contrasts with some then-modern theories of atomism.

In the fourth section, I apply some of Schelling's thinking to the knowledge argument as articulated by Frank Jackson's seminal 1982 essay "Epiphenomenal Qualia."<sup>2</sup> Here I carry over very little of Schelling's metaphysics. Nonetheless, I preserve the epistemological spirit of his thinking about quality, sensory experience, and the nature of the empirical. Following Schelling, I maintain that some sensory experiences are necessary for some non-trivial forms of empirical knowledge. I then argue that at least some sensory experience is physical information. Upon advancing this argument, I conclude that this implies a contradiction between the premises of Jackson's knowledge argument. I suggest we reject Jackson's premises. Finally, in the fifth section, I go on to briefly analyze the consequences of this view and its relation to the explanatory gap argument. I argue here that the premises of this argument must also be rejected.

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 127, (April 1982), 249 – 261.



## I. Being Sensible: Schelling's Early Theory of Qualities

What is precisely meant by quality? Let us take a first approximation by offering a simple, early version of what Schelling himself asserts: “*quality* is only that which is given to us in sensation.”<sup>3</sup> This definition, present in both the 1797 and 1803 revision of *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, will be adopted in my treatment of Schelling's own thought. Immediately following this quote Schelling provides examples of things given in sensation: “the colours of bodies, taste-sensations, and so on.” Let us refer to this as the folk conception of quality in that it offers us an ordinary array of sensed things that anyone might propose.<sup>4</sup>

It should be noted that originally this position coincides with a strongly subjective idealist stance.<sup>5</sup> This is something Schelling moves away from. He in fact criticizes his early view in the 1803 Supplement to the Introduction to the *Ideas* as “confused by the subordinate concepts of a merely relative idealism.”<sup>6</sup> In spite of this, Schelling's early articulations of his theory of quality in the *Ideas* lay the groundwork for much of his thinking on quality to come. Furthermore, the Preface to the Second Edition admits from the outset that what is offered in the text is but “first ideas and reflections” and contains “residual problems.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 207; *SW*, II, 259.

<sup>4</sup> Here I set aside some interesting complications concerning the possibility that there is a phenomenal experience to, for instance, thinking that such-and-such is the case.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, Schelling writes in the *Ideas*: “No objective existence is possible without a mind to know it, and conversely, no mind is possible without a world existing for it.” Schelling, *Ideas*, 177; *SW*, II, 222.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 52; *SW*, II, 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; *SW*, II, 7.

Schelling accords sensation a kind of non-reductive explanatory status. However, this is one that imposes an explicit limit on our ability to explain qualities as they are experienced. Amongst the same passage discussed above, he writes:

Now it is beyond doubt that what is given in sensation is capable, *as such*, of no further explanation . . . But anyone who takes up a science such as that of colours (called optics) must address himself to that question, notwithstanding that by explaining the *origin* of colours, he will never persuade himself of having also explained the *sensation* which colours evoke in us.<sup>8</sup>

This statement is neither the only of its kind in the *Ideas* nor is it the last time Schelling will repeat this theme *vis-à-vis* the notion of sensation as his thinking progresses in later works.<sup>9</sup> What makes this passage important is the distinction Schelling draws between, on the one hand, the *origin* of any given sensation and, on the other hand, the *experience evoked* by it. While he claims the former is something that can very well be explained and what he will speak of as the outer or external causes of such sensations, it is the latter, the experience or inner effects, where such explanations fail.<sup>10</sup>

For Schelling, this is not ultimately a matter of poor scientific frameworks or a current lack of empirical information that can perhaps be attained at a later date. He is drawing a hard limit. Thus, while he's clear that, say, calling upon optics does not allow us to understand the experience evoked by a particular color, including for instance the relevant neurophysiological information and its relation to optics does nothing for this

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 207 – 208; *SW*, II, 259.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance: Schelling, *First Outline of the Philosophy of Nature*, 209 – 211; *SW*, III, 293 – 297.

<sup>10</sup> This language of 'outer' or 'external' causes is what Schelling appears to have in mind when speaking of the origins of qualities in distinction to the experience itself. For an example, see Schelling, *Ideas*, 20; *SW*, II, 25 – 26.

aim either.<sup>11</sup> All this information can indeed help us to understand the causal origins of how quality arises in us as particular biological beings, but this does not account for the sensation we experience subjectively.

While his conception of quality and sensation so far appears to offer a standard folk understanding, the basis of his position is somewhat complex and where the heavy lifting of his theory begins to come into play. The very title of Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* already hints at the framework with which he will expand upon to develop his theory. This framework is none other than Kant's transcendental idealism. The reason why the title of Schelling's work betrays this influence is because we must read "Ideas" or "*Ideen*" here not just as a collection of thoughts about a philosophy of nature, but ideas in the Kantian lexicon as that which belongs to a special class of concepts that transcend possible experience, but that are nonetheless necessary. Because these concepts transcend possible experience, they are non-sensory. Such ideas are said to furnish us with regulative rather than constitutive concepts to organize, i.e., to provide unity for, our conditioned experience of the world. They are therefore necessary only for regulative purposes. They are the *unconditioned* totalities which inform much of Schelling's early thinking. Schelling signals toward this reading repeatedly, opening the

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<sup>11</sup> A particularly illustrative quote demonstrating that Schelling was well aware of these kinds of problems: "For it does not make sensation any more intelligible that nothing which exists outside of you should be in itself sweet or sour; in any case, you always assume a *cause* actually outside you, which produces these sensations in you. But suppose we allow you the inner effects of outer causation, what then have colours, scents, and the like, or the causes external to you of these sensations, in common with your mind? You investigate very meticulously how light reflected from bodies affects your optical nerves, also indeed how the inverted image on the retina is not inverted in your soul, but appears upright. But then again what is that in you which sees this image on the retina itself, and investigates how indeed it can have come into the soul? Obviously it is something which to this extent is completely independent of the external impression, and to which nevertheless this impression is not unknown. How then did the impression reach *this* region of your soul in which you feel wholly free and independent of impressions? However many intervening factors you insert between the effects on your nerves, brain, etc., and the idea of an external thing, you only deceive yourself; for the transition from the body to the soul, according to your own submissions, cannot occur continuously, but only by a leap, which you profess you would rather avoid." Ibid., 20; *SW*, II, 26.

preface to the first edition of the *Ideas* by evoking the regulative/constitutive distinction and going on to emphasize that his work only concerns ideas, repeatedly italicizing the word.

As was discussed in the first chapter, one central axis with which to track Schelling's changes in his thinking are the ways he treats ideas, e.g., God, the unconditioned totality of nature, etc., in this sense as regulative, and where he speculatively goes beyond the bounds of Kant's system in attributing a constitutive status to—that is, attributing a reality to—certain ideas. While this chapter cannot track the vacillations between regulative and constitutive that indeed occur even within the *Ideas* itself, a central concern I will now explore is how Schelling's discussion of quality and its relation to the basic forces of matter comes out of this Kantian framework.<sup>12</sup>

This conception of matter is taken from Kant, explicated in his 1786 *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.<sup>13</sup> Schelling explicitly references, criticizes, and regurgitates this text at length in the *Ideas*.<sup>14</sup> The basic picture Schelling takes up from Kant follows a simple line of reasoning. For the Kant of this treatise, "Matter is the *moveable* in space."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, that which moves is that which can affect the senses:

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<sup>12</sup> Herder's discussion of forces in his influential recasting of Spinoza in *God, Some Conversations* is likely implicitly relied on by Schelling as well. Herder tried to conceive of a thoroughgoing monism that attempts to unify the separation between Spinoza's attributes of thought and extension. Herder suggests that the forces active in matter are also active in thought, and that these forces are in fact identical. For instance, see Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, trans., Michael Friedman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> See Beiser, *German Idealism*, 511 – 515.

Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 74 – 77.

<sup>15</sup> Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, 15; 480.

“The basic determination of something that is to be an object of the outer senses had to be motion, because only thereby can these senses be affected.”<sup>16</sup> So, matter always has the possibility of being an object of sensation.<sup>17</sup> “*Matter*, as opposed to *form*,” Kant writes, “would be that in the outer intuition which is an object of sensation, and thus the properly empirical element of sensible and outer intuition, because it can in no way be given a priori.”<sup>18</sup>

This gives matter for Kant a strictly empirical reading. Wholly unsensible matter is by his lights a contradiction in terms. Additionally, Kant will argue that motion is fundamentally comprised of two so-called dynamic forces of attraction and repulsion. Since what we potentially sense is what is in motion according to Kant, these forces in play render not only motion possible but are also necessary conditions of sensibility. It is this meaning of “basic forces” that the Schelling of the *Ideas* will adopt as the metaphysical basis for his theory of qualities. Kant and Schelling will go on to maintain that we must assume infinite differences in degree between these forces that ultimately make up motion. Though all these degrees and forces can never be directly observed, they—or so is the claim—conceivably account for the empirical diversity of matter.

On both Kant and Schelling’s account, these forces reveal themselves by proxy in natural forces. For instance, Kant speaks of the force of attraction as the cause of Newtonian gravitation.<sup>19</sup> Schelling himself gestures at the idea that the force of attraction

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 12; 476.

<sup>17</sup> Here I remind the reader that for Kant, sensation is ultimately an issue of the sensible intuitions of space and time rather than first and foremost sensory organs.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 16; 481.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance: Ibid., 80; 541; Ibid., 103; 564.

finds varying empirical instantiations in forms of electrical conductivity.<sup>20</sup> This might strike one as pseudoscientific. Reading Schelling charitably, it should be stated that he acknowledges the autonomy of the empirical sciences. However, his *Naturphilosophie* project is centrally concerned with assessing the results of the sciences in order to see how they may fit or fail to do so within this more general framework. This will be the basis for what is called the dynamic view, which he (as well as Kant) will contrast with Newtonian mechanical atomism.

This is not an abstract issue for Schelling. A large discussion within the *Ideas* concerns the then unestablished science of chemistry and the question of how to legitimize it both empirically and under this dynamical view. This is why the Schelling of this text is principally focused on quality. Schelling viewed quality as falling within the domain of chemistry,<sup>21</sup> and wanted to understand how to render quality objective and therefore fruitful for empirical treatment.<sup>22</sup> But there is, arguably, a greater consideration with which Schelling was occupied, and that is to secure a place for the empirical itself. For if there is no means by which to render quality scientifically objective, the danger becomes not simply in abandoning our subjective sensory experiences, which observe the qualities of matter, when operating under a scientific frame. Rather, the danger amounts to the abandonment of the fundamental ways in which experience itself informs our empirical understanding of the world. Such a rejection of sensory experience would effectively render the endgame of the sciences an *a priori*—or as Schelling will say a

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<sup>20</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 106 – 107; *SW*, II, 135 – 138.

<sup>21</sup> “Now the science which deals with the quality of matter is chemistry.” *Ibid.*, 201; *SW*, II, 252.

<sup>22</sup> See George Di Giovanni, “Kant’s Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling’s *Ideas* for a Philosophy of Nature,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 17, No. 2, (April 1979), 210.

conceptual or, sometimes in his jargon, quantitative—endeavor. The stakes, then, are for the *a posteriori* itself.

Schelling is often spoken of as a great thinker of freedom. Rarely is he spoken of as a champion of the empirical. Even within scholarly commentary on the *Ideas*, a text so clearly concerned with investigating the latest scientific issues of his time, Schelling's conception of freedom is instead often stressed.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Schelling brings up freedom in the text, but not in any way worthy of lengthy discussion in the sense of 1809's *Freiheitsschrift*.

Likewise, Schelling, so typically labeled protean, is almost as regularly criticized in association with this for his strongly rationalist bent and flights of neo-Platonic fancy. But this protean label somehow is not also stressed in relation to his forays into the empirical sciences and reflections on empiricism. Even at the outset of the *Ideas*, Schelling is clear his text is not concerned with principles as much as thinking through the empirical findings of the day and their underlying assumptions: “But this essay does not begin from above (with the establishment of principles), but from below (with experimental findings and the testing of previous systems).”<sup>24</sup>

It is perhaps easy to see why this is overlooked. As with the example of electrical conductivity above, Schelling makes some strange and embarrassing pseudoscientific

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<sup>23</sup> In Di Giovanni's nineteen-page essay titled “Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*”, the term ‘freedom’ is used (more or less entirely in reference to Schelling) by my count twenty times. Schelling does so twenty-nine times in the entirety of the *Ideas*.

Di Giovanni, “Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*,” 197 – 215.

See also: Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, (London: Continuum, 2006), 64 – 66.

<sup>24</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 42; *SW*, II, 57.

analogies and speculations, a style which was then taken up with mixed results by his followers.<sup>25</sup> But following Di Giovanni, we should have the courage to read Schelling even where he is at his most pseudoscientific. “It is, however, in Schelling's handling of the details of physical theory that the originality of his thought is best revealed.”<sup>26</sup>

Further justification for overlooking Schelling's empirical thinking is perhaps provided by his central notion, discussed in prior chapters, of intellectual intuition. Intellectual intuition, contrasted with Kantian sensible intuition, for Schelling's system is treated as a pivotal moment self-consciousness. Inspired by Fichte's I=I and Descartes' *cogito*, Schelling attempted in various ways to establish a foundationalist reworking of transcendental idealism with the notion. More or less a rationalist-style philosophical crutch, throughout his career Schelling would rework this notion sometimes treating it as though it gave master key access to what German idealists commonly refer to as the absolute, i.e., God or Nature-with-a-capital-N.

However, even within the *Ideas*, when Schelling emphasizes that intuition is the primary and highest level of knowledge, this notion is not merely with reference to self-consciousness and intellectual intuition. Within the same passages, the high status of intuition is just as well made in relation to sensible intuition. Matter, as the central concern of outer intuition, is for that reason regarded by Schelling as “a visible analogue

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<sup>25</sup> See Keith R. Peterson, “Translator's Introduction,” in *First Outline of the Philosophy of Nature*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), xxxi.

Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, 67 – 68.

Giles Whitely, *Schelling's Reception in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 207 – 236.

<sup>26</sup> Di Giovanni, “Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature,” 207.



of the mind.”<sup>27</sup> And more importantly, Schelling will go on in 1799’s *First Outline* to revise the basis of his theory of quality utilizing a notion of *dynamic actants*, atom-like qualities ideally conceived.<sup>28</sup> These actants, he states, instantiate qualities that are “a *negative presentation*” of the unconditioned in the external world.<sup>29</sup> These qualities are what he goes on to in fact call the “unconditionally empirical.”<sup>30</sup> What this means is a bit tricky. Schelling believes that not only do at least some qualities and the experiences evoked by them fail to be explanatorily reducible, as noted above, but that this irreducibility implies something about the ontological status of the absolute, namely its unconditionality. Some issues with this claim I will discuss shortly.

Such statements are consistent with Schelling’s justifications around this period for fluctuating between the philosophical frameworks of a subjectivist transcendental idealism and a more realist *Naturphilosophie*. As he stresses in his preface to 1800’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling saw *Naturphilosophie* as a complimentary approach to transcendental idealism without the subjectivist baggage. Straddling the fence between two different ontological commitments, he wanted to conceive of nature in a way free from the subjective restraints of transcendental idealism while not violating the tenants of it. Nonetheless, he resolutely abandons this position the next year. Still, at a minimum the empirical functions up to and including this point in 1800 as an external

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<sup>27</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 177; *SW*, II, 222.

<sup>28</sup> As stated in the prior chapter, Schelling does not go on to maintain his theory of dynamic actants. See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 19; *SW*, III, 21.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 22; *SW*, III, 24

instantiation of what Schelling sought internally with his one-sided transcendental idealism.<sup>31</sup>

As noted earlier, Schelling sees his philosophy of nature as offering the foundation of empirical research. This position is developed in opposition to a then-contemporary theoretical foil, namely Newtonian mechanical physics and theories of atomism associated with it. Schelling is not wholly opposed to mechanical physics. Rather, he argues that a mechanical explanation of how particles impart motion on one another cannot also explain how such interactions can impart qualities: “I understand how one body could (mechanically) strike the other and so impart motion to it; but how a body completely devoid of qualities could impart quality to another, this nobody understands, and nobody can make it intelligible.”<sup>32</sup> Though the mathematization of physics under this model Schelling partly concedes, he finds such a model impoverished when it comes to quality.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, he contends that the various theories of atomism that ground mechanical physics and account for qualities do not hold up under scrutiny. By atomism Schelling means the thesis that matter is ultimately made of primary particles that have no further constituent parts.<sup>34</sup> This follows from his prior contention. For by his and

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<sup>31</sup> In one of the supplements to the 1803 edition of the *Ideas*, Schelling actually describes his view as such: “idealism accordingly, even when taken in its one-sidedness, as in the present work, still leads more directly to the *essence* of things than a realism bereft and robbed of all light of the ideal.” Schelling, *Ideas*, 191; *SW*, II, 240.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21; *SW*, II, 28.

<sup>33</sup> The influence of Goethe’s optics, in which the role of subjective sensation and the sense organs are taken seriously, in contrast to Newton’s optics is also worth noting. See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans., Charles Lock Eastlake, (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006).

<sup>34</sup> For Kant’s similar discussion of atomism, see Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations*, 69 – 74; 530 – 535.

Kant's account, if mechanics cannot account for quality, and quality is material—that is, matter as conceived as sensible—then mechanics' account of atomism must also fail.

There are numerous problems Schelling raises against the atomist, but the central question he asks is simply: “what entitles the atomist to stop short at these points?”<sup>35</sup>

Schelling questions the ground of this position by raising a dilemma: either this position is empirically justifiable or not. The problem with the latter horn of the dilemma—that is, the problem with simply conceiving of atoms as grounding a theory of matter—is that it is just as conceivable that we can always further divide any particle with which we come into contact.<sup>36</sup> That is, one may very well conceive of subconstituents of anything we wish to consider basic. Let us call this the infinite divisibility problem.<sup>37</sup> This, of course, finds its origins in Kant's second antinomy in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Leibniz explicitly attributes his positing of formal atoms—of which Schelling's 1799 theory of dynamic actants is a direct descent—in contrast to material atoms because of this issue.<sup>39</sup> If atomists wish merely to conceive of

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<sup>35</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 161; *SW*, II, 200 – 201.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Here is an excerpt of Schelling's rejection of atomism and its relation to the problem: “Moreover, since matter is nothing else but the product of an original synthesis (of opposite forces) in intuition, we thereby escape the sophisms concerning the infinite divisibility of matter, in that we no more need to maintain, with a self-misconceiving metaphysics, that matter is *made up* of infinitely many parts (which is absurd), than we require, with the atomists, to set limits to the freedom of the imagination in the act of division. . . . If I claim, on the other hand, that matter is *made up* of an infinity of parts, I lend it an existence independent of my presentation, and thereby fall into the inevitable contradictions associated with the presupposition of matter as a thing-in-itself.” See *Ibid.*, 189 – 190; *SW*, II, 238 – 239.

<sup>38</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A435 – A443/B464 – B471.

<sup>39</sup> For instance, see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “A New System of the Nature and the Communication of Substances, as Well as the Union Between the Soul and the Body,” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, vol. 2, trans., Leroy E. Loemker, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 454 – 457. See also: Leibniz, “Correspondence with Arnauld” 1686 – 1687 (selections), in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, vol. 2, 343 – 344.

basic matter, they must address why this problem does not spell trouble for their conception. Because such a notion does not seem of necessity to compel us to conceive of such corpuscles as indivisible, Schelling sees the notion as arbitrary.<sup>40</sup>

And the problem with the former horn of the dilemma is that atomists fail to furnish their claims with any experiential evidence. Assuming we are wrong about the infinite divisibility problem, the atomist should provide evidence contrary to this view. Schelling even goes so far as to devote an entire chapter lambasting the Newtonian mechanical physics of Le Sage, claiming that his atomism does not even enjoy the dignity of verification: “The greatest advantage to M. le Sage’s system is that it lies in a region where no experience can either confirm or confute it.”<sup>41</sup>

Here we encounter not only a sympathetic strain of Schelling’s empiricism, but early traces of his dialectical thinking as well. Utilizing the momentum of a position’s own premises to propel its own refutation I take to be a hallmark of dialectics.<sup>42</sup> And it is by following each of the possibilities in favor of atomism, Schelling argues, that atomism’s own refutation is located. Atomism, in claiming to offer an empirical ground for matter, does not offer any evidence in favor of it—internal to its own system. And in the case of merely conceiving of a fundamental substance, atomism ends up offering a position that cannot even be substantiated in thought, where further division always

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<sup>40</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 162; *SW*, II, 202.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 168 – 169; *SW*, II, 211.

<sup>42</sup> As Hegel will say in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: “If the refutation is thorough, then it is derived from and developed out of that fundamental proposition or principle itself – the refutation is not pulled off by bringing in counter-assertions and impressions external to the principle. Such a refutation would thus genuinely be the development of the fundamental proposition itself; it would even be the proper augmentation of the principle’s own defectiveness if it were not to make the mistake of focusing solely on its *negative* aspect without taking note of its results and the advances it has made in their *positive* aspect.” G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §24.

appears possible: “the real seems to flee before me, or to vanish under my hand,” Schelling writes, “and matter, the first foundation of all experience, becomes the most insubstantial thing we know.”<sup>43</sup>

This becomes a theme that surfaces throughout the *Ideas*. Schelling will go on to apply this critique in relation to various qualities when confronting atomist-style attempts to explain their possibility. Schelling will criticize scientific authors as postulating “occult qualities,” “an inner constitution of matter,” and “elementary stuff” to account for the qualities of matter. Essentially an extension of atomism, he will argue that such notions only pass the burden of explanation to something further unexplainable and unverifiable, namely a completed physics or undiscovered fundamental particles. As I will argue in the final chapter of this text, discussions around physicalism as well as more radical outgrowths like panpsychism (i.e., theorizers of intrinsic properties) fall under the same line of criticism. They are forms neoatomism that cloak their speculations in the prestige of the empirical without ever providing such evidence. And in their bare conceiving, they seem only to stop the line of questioning at an artificial bedrock. Such theories are what Schelling would describe as forms of “hyperphysical physics” where everything is spoken of as enjoying a physical basis, but a basis which can only be in the meantime fabricated with the powers of thought.<sup>44</sup>

Schelling’s alternative to this problem is to reject the hope of empirically discovering the basis of matter, embracing instead the thesis that the ground of substance and therefore experience is indeed insubstantial. However, he will not reject the *idea* that

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<sup>43</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 17; *SW*, II, 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 166; *SW*, II, 207.

we must conceive of a fundamental basis of qualities like the atomists or modern theorists of intrinsic properties. This will be the motivation for his hitherto mentioned theory of dynamic actants in 1799's *First Outline*. It is just that these ideas are spoken of for speculative purposes and must always be qualified as unverifiable because they provide the basis for verification. But his central motivation for this is precisely because such conceptions that attempt to claim otherwise will always go beyond experience anyway.

In what will become a standard German idealist philosophical gesture, the suggestion, then, is that this problematic situation speaks to the truth of it. Substance, as that which allows us to experience the world at all, Schelling states, cannot itself be experienceable on pain of circularity or undermining the notion of the empirical itself: “[the determinations of matter] pertain so much to the possibility of a specific presentation of matter . . . that it is equally impossible to give a physical explanation of them, for every physical explanation already presupposes them.”<sup>45</sup>

Schelling will describe basis of matter as empirically *non-presentable*. “The character of non-presentability,” Schelling writes, “is thus at the same time a character essential to the concept of substance . . . An essential character, because a substance, as soon as it is presentable quite separately for itself, becomes a matter, which we can now in turn think of as further compounded.”<sup>46</sup> Schelling believes this for conceptual reasons. Anything empirical that claims to ground the empirical either begs the question or must divert to some further ground (hence: “as further compounded”). This is because, by his

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 194; *SW*, II, 243.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 251; *SW*, II, 315 – 316.

account, the empirical can only follow a chain of conditioned justification, as was discussed in Chapter 2. That is, we can always continue to ask the question: what grounds this purported empirical ground? Put differently, because matter for Schelling is qualitative, and qualities are sensible, nothing empirically observable and hence sensible could wholly explain sensibility itself.

In this sense, Schelling's rationalism can be found. But it his analysis of quality that allows us some reservations with regard to this label. For it is quality itself which Schelling alleges presents us with an empirical confrontation with the unconditioned. This cannot be a rationalist thesis insofar as quality is understood as informing us about the underlying conditions about substance beyond the labors of thought. While intellectual intuition furnishes Schelling with the notion of a privileged act of thinking that he purports provides access to some sort of knowledge of the absolute, empirical intuition, on the contrary, furnishes us with the notion of a privileged act of experience that demarcates a limit to our knowledge. In this way, it is negative form of knowledge. We know what the basis of substance cannot be. Quality, or at least some qualities as Schelling will go on to argue, can evade further analysis. And the fact that this is so for Schelling makes qualitative experience epistemically unique. This leads Schelling to conclude that the concept of substance is non-presentable and that this suggests something informative about the structure of the world. The problem, as I will soon discuss, is that Schelling draws a positive ontological conclusion from this negative epistemic one.

It should be noted that this position of Schelling's is not a brand of naïve skeptical empiricism that affirms the truth of sense impressions, matter and the empirical as

straightforwardly basic, given, or self-evident. Nothing for Schelling is given to us as such, though his speculative flights and cursory accounts sometimes suggest this. Though Hegel will famously go on to make the argument against givenness in relation to (then) modern skeptical empiricism, Schelling will suggest a similar, albeit far less thorough, critique in relation to atomism.<sup>47</sup> In one of his 1803 supplements to the *Ideas*, Schelling speaks of atomism as a position due to “the thoughtlessness of an empirical age,” and one that views “Nature as merely a given.” Notably, he will go on to say that we must rise “above the standpoint of givenness, and to the Idea of the universe.”<sup>48</sup> The point is that the conceptual apparatus we bring to bear will always already inform the sense impressions we encounter. Recall Kant: “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”<sup>49</sup>

Of course, this is Kantian in origin, but Schelling takes this critique in a far more speculative direction that makes this distinctly not a Kantian thesis. For Schelling is not simply granting the forms of intuition—and thus the empirical—the privilege to confer upon mere thought (in the technical Kantian sense) the capacity for cognition. That is, the empirical here does not function just as an epistemic validator of judgements. Rather, the empirical on Schelling’s account also allows us to circumscribe the outer reaches of the unconditioned absolute. Where an analysis of quality hits bedrock is also where the unconditioned will be demarcated for him.

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<sup>47</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans., T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, and H.S. Harris, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 76 – 80; §37 – 39.

<sup>48</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 170; *SW*, II, 213.

<sup>49</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75.



We reach at last the nearly paradoxical basis of Schelling's theory. If empiricism is to be saved, Schelling contends, all theories that assert an empirical basis to sensory experience itself must be rejected. And that also means that a physical basis must also be rejected, for, again, what is empirical is physical and what is physical is empirical for Schelling. So, by his account, if presentation is to be made sense of, it must be grounded in a theory of the non-presentable.

To avoid outright paradox, of course, Schelling offers the alternative of a transcendental basis of matter and a regulative conception of the whole of nature. This basis is one in which we assume dynamic forces as grounding matter, but for that reason acting as the conditions of possible experience. The dynamic forces, as the basis of motion and therefore the basis of the presentable, is precisely what he has in mind by the non-presentable: "For *force* means what, at least as a *principle*, we can put at the apex of natural science, and what, although not itself presentable, yet, in the *way it works*, is definable by physical laws."<sup>50</sup> This assumption, as I have discussed in prior chapters, will function axiomatically (or derivatives thereof), as was Schelling's standard philosophical approach.<sup>51</sup>

## **II. Just Feelings: On the Justification and Order of Explanation of Sensory Experience**

While his insight about the explanatory irreducibility of sensory experience may be correct, the metaphysical moves Schelling makes here are dubious. I recommend we take

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<sup>50</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 38; *SW*, II, 50.

<sup>51</sup> "But if attractive and repulsive forces are themselves conditions of the *possibility* of matter—or rather, if matter itself is nothing else but these forces, conceived in conflict, then these principles stand at the apex of all natural science, either as lemmas from a higher science, or as axioms that must be presupposed before all else, if physical explanation is to be otherwise possible at all." *Ibid.*, 154; *SW*, II, 192.

an alternative route to the issue that avoids ontological conclusions while still preserving Schelling's basic epistemological position. I want to say that just because our empirical knowledge of the sensory experience of quality appears to meet with an epistemic limit does not mean that it therefore entails an ontological one. That is, we can very well grant that our experiences of qualities may have an irreducible explanatory character without granting anything about the nature of substance. Rather, the issue appears to simply concern the order of explanation when it comes to the justification of our knowledge about quality.

We might argue that a comprehensive and adequate explanation of quality (i.e., one that takes into account all causal features of a quality and its relation to sensation) cannot be entirely reducible to external scientific accounts because part of our scientific understanding of quality itself is in part constituted by our first-person sensory experiences themselves. This is because there are important empirical insights into sensory experience that first depend on one having such an experience in the first place. So, if one wishes to explain the experience of these sensations on the basis of such scientific accounts, the story told inevitably runs into the circularity of trying to explain the very thing, i.e., the experience, presupposed.

For instance, suppose one wishes to justify a statement about sensory experience like 'I am perceiving the color red.' At a minimum, the statement's justification depends on one actually perceiving the color red at the time of its utterance. Counterfactually, if one were not actually perceiving the color red, the statement would be unjustified. And no added external scientific account regarding, e.g., optics, the neurophysiology of vision, etc., can escape this basic demand of experience itself. For even if we were well

aware of the external observational criteria necessary to safely conclude someone is in fact justified behaviorally in making such a sensory report without always depending on a first-person experience, those criteria themselves must have originated in linking such experiences to the criteria.

Take for example the identification of color experience with its place on the electromagnetic spectrum, e.g., ‘This color red I am perceiving is comprised of such-and-such a wavelength.’ Identity statements like those between a color experience and its wavelength appear to be perfectly informative empirical statements about the physical world. They are so informative in fact, that one might reasonably make the case that knowing what wavelength is being shown to someone else is enough to conclude that such a person is justified or not in speaking about having a certain color experience. Thus, it would seem a first-person account is not needed. Instead, all that is needed is that an individual stands in the right relation to a certain wavelength. Nonetheless, this clearly depends on originally drawing a connection to wavelengths where one part of the relation is necessarily the sensory experience itself.

Hence, we can very well explain the qualitative concept of the color red by way of its spectrum of wavelengths, its connection to the neurophysiology of vision, and so forth, but this does not adequately explain the color as we feel it. And this is simply because those accounts are already inextricably linked to such experiences. Again, it was the experience itself that in part allowed us to draw the connections between it and our scientific accounts. Consequently, any attempt to reduce experience to some kind of external criteria would fail to scratch our explanatory itch. Such an attempt, in fact, would be a fool’s errand since experience is latently presupposed.

This would be consistent with Schelling's general assertion about the explanatory irreducibility of sensory experience and his distinction raised at the beginning of the first section between the *origin* of sensations and the *experience evoked* by them. However, *contra* Schelling, this implies nothing interesting about the underlying ontological state of substance, the forces of matter, or the so-called unconditioned absolute. The explanatory irreducibility we seem to encounter merely results from the order that such explanations must take. For certain scientific concepts like linking wavelengths to colors, sensation comes first. In a way, then, experience remains epistemically basic and perhaps lends quality and sense an irreducible and special status at the level of our knowledge. Either way, clarifying the order of explanation thus allows us to avoid the temptation of a circularity and, at the same time, some frivolous ontological speculations.

### **III. Back to Basics: More on Schelling's Theory of Quality**

Yet one might rightfully ask if Schelling in fact is speculating ontologically. For, after all, he is clear at least in his earlier works that some of the notions he is employing are for regulative use and others are for the transcendental (hence non-ontological) basis of natural science. As it so happens, he changes this view and becomes a resolute realist about this basis. Here I will focus on Schelling by briefly reviewing his general position and how his picture of qualities derives from it. Though in the next sections I take up a distilled version of Schelling's thinking without its metaphysical baggage, there are some philosophical consequences to his theory that are worth drawing out in relation to the rest of his thinking.

Schelling spills a great deal of ink trying to broadcast the benefits of his metaphysical position. In particular, he believes the dynamic approach—as the thesis that

maintains that attractive and repulsive forces constitute the essence of matter—offers a superior alternative to atomism. Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a comprehensive look into dynamics, it should at least be asked why Schelling views this as a viable framework. Why is it that we should assume, instead of indivisible particles, attractive and repulsive forces of motion as the basis of matter? Since he rejects the empirical route, he must offer a worthy conceptual one. But since the latter cannot be subject to verification in the same manner as the former, the theory will need to offer some sort of powerful upshot. As was the fashion in transcendental idealism, the target will be a matter of conditions of possibility of knowledge.

Like his arguments against atomism, there are several arguments he offers in favor of dynamics. Perhaps the simplest one is that atomism, like dynamics, must assume a basic conception of motion in order to describe atoms and their interactions. This conception itself runs into the issue of justification. Obviously, motion is an observable phenomenon. But what is the origin of motion itself? Again, Schelling, following Kant, believes that we must posit the existence of forces as the conditions of possibility of motion and thus matter. I set aside the question as to whether such forces are even needed to understand motion. Furthermore, Schelling asserts that even if atomism were the case, such forces must already be presupposed, otherwise motion itself is unintelligible.<sup>52</sup> “What *necessity* are we under,” Schelling asks, “to go on calling upon *mechanical* causes to explain universal motion, so long, at least, as we can make do with those *original*

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<sup>52</sup> “For motion can in general be *communicated* only by means of the action and reaction of *repulsive* or *attractive* forces.” Ibid., 165; *SW*, II, 207.

*dynamical* forces which are already required for the possibility of matter as such?”<sup>53</sup>

Schelling seems to believe not that dynamics is simply a better alternative to mechanical physics, but that dynamics has the possibility to step theoretically behind mechanics because the former already mobilizes the concepts of the latter.

In this way, Schelling thinks he can account for the assumptions of mechanics internal to his own system of dynamics. He therefore does not discard the former’s possibility but suggests that it is one derivative aspect of dynamics and of (a flawed way of) viewing the world.<sup>54</sup> The necessity that mechanics claims to grasp, then, is framed somewhat sympathetically. What is rejected is the thesis that this necessity mechanics appears to capture has an explanatory monopoly on the world. As touched on in the third chapter, this theme will arise again in the Introduction to 1799’s *First Outline*. There, Schelling suggests that the pretense of a wholly necessitarian conception like that of mechanical physics is the result of a structural illusion—the product of the notion of what he titles negativity. It is the result of viewing the world in a staccato, static manner, robbed of its becoming and thus activity.<sup>55</sup> Such a physics remains possible, but he thinks its explanatory capture is limited and derivative.

Moreover, Schelling takes issue with mechanics’ premise of the distinction asserted between force and matter. Schelling rejects the thesis that forces act on matter and that motion is enacted through the former upon an otherwise inert atoms of matter. Schelling sees this matter/force distinction as an assumption that tacitly admits of a

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 167; *SW*, II, 208.

<sup>54</sup> See Di Giovanni, “Kant’s Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling’s Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature,” 209 – 211.

<sup>55</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 201 – 211; *SW*, III, 282 – 297.

dualism his framework seeks to reject.<sup>56</sup> By claiming a distinction, Schelling suggests atomists fail to explain how force acts on matter in the first place.<sup>57</sup> Rather, he claims, matter is ultimately a property of forces.

By making matter the product of forces and making the basic forces of attraction and repulsion the conditions of possibility of matter, matter is seen as continuous with force and therefore motion. Or at least this is the claim. This inversion happens to mirror another in Schelling's thought. For the Schelling of the *Freiheitsschrift*, freedom for Schelling is not simply a property of some beings, rather, the totality of nature is said to possess it in some way.<sup>58</sup> This is not a matter of coincidence. This is because Schelling views the notion of force itself as particularizations—determinations—of the so-called unconditioned activity of the absolute discussed in the prior chapter, and unconditioned activity as grounding spontaneity and thus freedom. Freedom under Schelling's conception is beyond the scope of this discussion, but it is useful to point out to see how he envisions the points of his system connect.

This continuity between unconditioned activity and force also allows him to retrofit his *Identitätsphilosophie* to his earlier thinking on nature (again, *Ideas* was republished with supplements in 1803 and his ontological realist project of the *Identitätsphilosophie* period begins officially in 1801). This is worth dwelling on

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<sup>56</sup> See Benjamin Berger, "The Difference Between Schelling's and Hegel's Conceptions of Matter," in *Understanding Matter*, Vol 1, eds., Andrea Le Moli, and Angelo Ciatello, (Palermo: New Digital Frontiers, 2015), 171 – 176.

<sup>57</sup> "Matter is not insubstantial, you say, for it has original forces, which cannot be annihilated by any subdivision. "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?" Schelling, *Ideas*, 17 – 18; *SW*, II, 22 – 23.

<sup>58</sup> See Michelle Kosch, "Idealism and freedom in Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*," in *Interpreting Schelling*, ed. Lara Ostaric, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 151.

momentarily, for there are moments in the *Ideas* that certainly allow Schelling to deftly slide into his later position while more or less maintaining his conceptions of force, sense and matter. For the transcendental idealist Schelling of the 1797 *Ideas*, it is clear that the basic dynamic forces are conditions of possibility. And matter as a whole, therefore, is only thought of in the Kantian sense. However, in his 1803 revision, matter is declared as knowable.

Evidence for this can be found between the alteration of key passage in the *Ideas*. In the original edition of Book II, Chapter 8 of the *Ideas*, Schelling writes: “Everything we call matter is simply a modification of matter as such—if only matter as such were a mere thought.”<sup>59</sup> Notably, however, this mention of substance, i.e., matter as such, contains a Kantian epistemological hedge—the utilization of the critical distinction between thought and cognition. Crucially, however, this drops out of this quote in the 1803 edition. Schelling modifies this line with the following: “I would say that everything we call matter is simply a modification of one and the same matter, which admittedly, in its absolute state of equilibrium, we do not know by sense, and which must enter into special relationships to be knowable for us in this way.”<sup>60</sup>

Now in the *Identitätsphilosophie* phase, Schelling asserts instead that matter as such, though not knowable by sense, is *still* knowable via “special relationships.” This is transparently not a Kantian thesis. For it is the epistemological hallmark of Kant’s system that knowledge without the possibility of intuition, that is, sense, is not knowledge. But as noted above, Schelling of the earlier *Ideas* was already flirting with similar non-Kantian

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<sup>59</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 223; *SW*, II, 278.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*



expressions though his various foundationalist proclamations regarding the unconditioned. Now, we see in 1803 the revised claim resolutely affirming a rationalist as well as a realist thesis about the nature of substance. Schelling now thinks that we can not only have empirical access to observed particulars of matter and can conceive of their conditions of possibility, but we also have knowledge of substance as such, which is a much stronger claim and an ontological one at that.

This realist conception about matter as such means Schelling makes a properly speculative turn that could only be stated inconsistently and half-way with his earlier transcendental idealist language. If matter as such is epistemically accessible, what becomes possible is a manner in which Schelling may situate the subject itself within nature, making it continuous with it.<sup>61</sup> This also ties into the Eleatic epistemological thesis of his *Identitätsphilosophie* that thinking and being are the same.<sup>62</sup> If the basic dynamic forces, as determinations of activity as such, are actual, then the subject's thought and sense are ultimately extensions of the latter.<sup>63</sup> In fact, this was already a claim maintained in the original edition:

All *thinking* and presentation in us is therefore necessarily preceded by an *original activity*, which, *because it precedes* all thinking, is to that extent absolutely *undetermined* and *unconfined*. Only once an opposing element is

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<sup>61</sup> "Just as Kant had required that thought, in order to be existentially valid, be always the thought of sensibly given objects, so Schelling now requires that, in order to lay claim to the same validity, the reflective representation by spirit of itself or of nature be shown to be itself a definite moment in the process by which spirit emerges out of nature." Di Giovanni, "Kant's Metaphysics of Nature and Schelling's Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature," 215.

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of Schelling's Eleatic inclinations, see Adrian Johnston, "Monism and Mistakes," in *German Idealism and Poststructuralism*, eds., Tilottama Rajan, and Daniel Whistler, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, forthcoming).

<sup>63</sup> I acknowledge this makes several inferences that Schelling may not be entitled to. Here I must set aside the details and issues with these claims as I only wish to connect the main points of his system.

present does it become a *restricted* and, for that very reason, a *determinant* (thinkable) activity.<sup>64</sup>

This is also the main reason why freedom as a notion is discussed at all in the *Ideas*. For it is the subject's very perceiving that is asserted to be a product of encountering an activity that is not one's own—essentially an articulation of the Fichtean not-I. This gives an opening for Schelling to assert that it is the very freedom of the subject that is disclosed reciprocally. For it is in this encounter with the external constraints of the world that, so he claims, we learn of our own allegedly originary lack of constraint. Perception and sense, therefore, are derivative of Schelling's philosophy of freedom and activity in addition to his epistemology.

There is one last element of Schelling's theory of quality that should be touched on and that is his general hierarchy of qualities and how he envisions the science of quality to be teased out. This is something within the *Ideas* not systematically presented, but only sketched out in passing. However, it is important to highlight because it reveals, roughly, a non-reductive thesis about (pure) qualities, which he uses to justify his claim that ultimately the experience evoked by qualities resists analysis.

In relation to the quote above, Schelling suggests that thinking and sensing are preceded by an undetermined activity, and these only become determinate through restriction. The same will apply to his analysis of qualities. That is, just as the activities of the world seem to follow a conceptual hierarchy that passes from less determinate (or determinable) to more determinate, more general to particular, so, too, does quality—in being ultimately grounded in activity—follow such a path.

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<sup>64</sup> Schelling, *Ideas*, 174; *SW*, II, 218.

The basic picture is as follows. We have activity (of Nature, or the absolute, etc.) as such, which instantiates itself first through the dynamic forces. Differing relations between these two forces lead to differing basic determinations of matter. These basic determinations of matter Schelling will title “basic substances.” Recall that for Schelling, one major motivation for his analysis of quality is to envision a way in which chemistry, which, again he sees as investigating qualities of matter, can be rendered in a science. He defines basic substance as “a substance beyond which we cannot get in our experiments.”<sup>65</sup> Like the atomist, Schelling envisions these substances as bedrock that resist further empirical investigation. And he thinks it is the job of chemistry to find them. However, unlike atomism, Schelling does not assert dogmatically that any of these basic substances remains permanently so. They are tentative and discovered inductively as scientific study progresses and they are only postulated “as are needed for purposes of empirical scientific research.”<sup>66</sup>

Each basic substance is introduced by the chemist as the “*unknown cause of a specific quality of matter*.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, these basic substances confer qualities, which, like their substances, are posited as fundamental. I am tempted to refer to these qualities as *pure qualities*, though Schelling uses this term only once in the *Ideas*. The point is that some qualities are basic in that no further current scientific investigation can explain them. Such qualities are then suggested to further interact with one another in testable ways, probably with the suggestion being that further derivable qualities can be

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 233; *SW*, II, 293.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 234; *SW*, II, 293.

understood.<sup>68</sup> Each of these basic substances and their qualities are in theory only different manifestations of the varying degrees of relations between the basic dynamic forces. But as mentioned above, since we cannot empirically verify these fundamental forces and their relations since the empirical presupposes them (i.e., matter presupposes them), Schelling believes the best we can do is identify by proxy the results closest to such interactions, namely these basic substances, their qualities, and the physical forces revealed in these substances' interactions.<sup>69</sup> These act essentially as empirically encountered limiting concepts of the physical.<sup>70</sup>

To date Schelling's theory, he refers to oxygen as a basic substance.<sup>71</sup> The periodic table of elements had yet to be developed, but it would be a mistake to liken this

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<sup>68</sup> This is somewhat of an extrapolation on my part. Schelling only suggests a picture like this in passing: “[Chemistry’s] 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 effecting separations and combination—artificially, to be sure, but by means that Nature herself provides. These separations and combinations must therefore relate to the *quality* of matter.” Ibid., 206; *SW*, II, 257.

<sup>69</sup> Though Schelling wants this, the conclusions found in the *Ideas* often suggests otherwise and will propel further developments in Schelling's theory. This is because the dynamic forces that make up matter are spoken of as a matter of degree. The question will be raised how this can mean anything other than quality reducing to quantity, for degree is a quantitative concept. Schelling suggests an alternative picture in 1799's *Outline* when he introduces the notion of dynamic actants, which, similar to the dynamic forces, conceived of as qualitatively fundamental notions, which somewhat allows bypassing the challenge of quantitative degrees, though this comes at the tax of great leaps in speculation. For a detailed account of the development of Schelling's early theory of quality, see Benjamin Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 65 – 93.

<sup>70</sup> Schelling writes: “the only thing that can legitimately elude all empirical studies of Nature is the relationship of the basic forces of matter. For since this itself first makes possible a *determinate* matter (nor is there any other), we cannot in turn explain it on a physical basis, i.e., one that *presupposes* matter. So with this presupposition (that all quality in matter rests on relationships of its basic forces), we have provided the warrant for subjecting empirical research to certain limits, which it is not permitted to overstep. And with this we have secured the right to express every particular *quality* of matter, if only it be a definite and permanent quality, by means of basic substances, which may be regarded as limits to distinguish the field of an experiential study of Nature, resting upon facts, from the domain of a purely *philosophical* natural science, or from the broad and uncertain terrain of mere imagination and speculation.” Schelling, *Ideas*, 233 – 234; *SW*, II, 293.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 235; *SW*, II, 295.

to Schelling's conception. This is because as we know now, the elements on the periodic table are further decomposable. They are therefore matters with which we can go further in our experimentation. Thus, by his definition, the elements like oxygen cannot be basic substances. Where we know the causes of a substance, Schelling writes, "we have no right to take refuge in basic substances."<sup>72</sup> By such a standard then, Schelling's conception of chemistry occasionally strays and seems closer to today's particle physics.

To complicate matters more, Schelling speaks of light as a pure quality as he believes it functions at the lowest level of qualitative experience: "light stands in any case at the limits of all matter known to us, and to that extent seems itself to be pure quality."<sup>73</sup> Photons were discovered long after Schelling's death, but perhaps he would have something like this in mind as a basic substance with light being its so-called pure quality, though I am in no position to speak on the latest perspectives on this matter.

Although Schelling's empirical speculations come off as pseudoscientific, this should at least illustrate conceptually what he is after. Whatever the sciences hit upon that seem to evade further analysis is what we should treat as tentatively fundamental. And that will be a good candidate for what he had in mind.

It is worthy of note that for him this idea of the tentatively fundamental implies something problematic at bottom about the nature of quality. However, as I discussed above, I believe we should resist his ontological conclusions he draws from his epistemic premises. Consistent with his earlier discussed argument that matter as such cannot be empirically justified on pain of circularity, Schelling's notion of basic substance and pure

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 234; *SW*, II, 293.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.; *SW*, II, 294.

quality must lead us to the conclusion that anything empirically fundamental evades further empirical explanation. Since the empirical depends epistemically in part on the possibility of sensation, Schelling suggests (again, wrongly I believe) that the experience of qualities seems ultimately to decompose into brute facts or something close. This would mean that he may affirm a kind of explanatory gap in relation to quality, which I will touch on the next chapter.

As for other derived qualities, Schelling believes that their causes can be disclosed following the normal scientific procedures and nothing special needs to be postulated. Still, this raises (amongst many others) the question as to how reliable his folk conception of quality is since it is perfectly conceivable (in addition to being something we know today) that some qualities, e.g., ultraviolet, cannot be directly experienceable by our own senses. The existence of such phenomena seems to belie Schelling's folk conception of quality and thus his account of empirical knowledge. For if the latter were not qualitative since the qualitative is what we can potentially sense, we could not empirically corroborate the existence of such qualities by his account. But here we must guard against a naïve empiricism Schelling wishes to reject. Just what something like direct access means here is a story complicated by his transcendental idealist origins: sense informs concepts, concepts form sense.<sup>74</sup> Additionally, for the transcendental idealist, the notion of sense itself in the last instance concerns the sensible intuitions of space and time. As a result, while there are certainly qualities not sensible for us as

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<sup>74</sup> However, one may ask how intelligible this scheme-content dualism is if the two are said to be so closely connected. This is a tension of Schelling's monism I cannot attend to here unfortunately, but it is central question in the development of an Eleatic epistemology he only wants but never adequately develops.

See also: Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 47, (1973 – 1974), 5 – 20.

humans, such qualities are nevertheless locatable within space and time and in this technical manner sensible.

Consequently, how qualities are uncovered need not rely on the limitations of our own sense organs. Schelling envisions a sort of reciprocal relation involved in the disclosing of qualities and their causes, and this applies across the board.<sup>75</sup> We may very well have concepts of unexperienced or unexperienceable qualities, but they will, on Schelling's account, take on what he categorizes as a *quantitative* role. The concept of a quantity as such is "of a something within undetermined limits."<sup>76</sup> Thus, an unexperienceable quality like ultraviolet will lack a degree of particularity for us. However, this does not shroud such qualities wholly in mystery. While we personally cannot experience such qualities, we can surmise its properties through an investigation of the physical world and acknowledge the shortcomings of our concepts of these qualities. For example, we know that bees have the capacity to sense ultraviolet, which is sometimes referred to as 'bee purple.' While we cannot perceive bee purple, bees seem very much able to utilize this information in testable ways, which is why we can with reason state that they have sensations of this quality. And such an inference, I think, depends loosely on our own understanding of the perceptions of qualities with which we can interact.

In contemporary discussions surrounding quality and reductionism, it is sometimes implied that moving from general to particular or from folk to scientific goes

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<sup>75</sup> "It is clear from this that quantity and quality are necessarily connected. The former first acquires determinacy through the latter, and it is through the former that the latter first acquires limits and degree. But to transform what is actually sensed into *concepts* is to rob it of its reality." Schelling, *Ideas*, 215; *SW*, II, 270.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 214; *SW*, II, 268.

in the direction *away from* ordinary sense and quality to what Schelling would entitle mere concepts or quantity. But for Schelling, given to inversions, it is the opposite. The individuality and specificity of some phenomena depend on quality to empirically establish their concepts via sensation and observation. We therefore do not necessarily approach a more determinate understanding of the physical world in departing from our qualitative notions on his picture. To be sure, this is different from saying that understanding the world and its causes means the way in which we sense things is always correct. Additionally, this does not mean that we must always traffic in the language of quality, for often qualitative properties are not relevant to causes (e.g., a shot fired from a pink pistol is just as effective as from a black one). Thus, we do move away from qualities in an obvious manner in tracking specifics. But doing so with the ultimate aim to abandon the role of quality for us *in toto* is something untenable or rather inconceivable for Schelling from an empirical standpoint.

At the end of the day, at whatever level of conceptual decomposition, quality is a primary constituent of some non-trivial forms of empirical knowledge. Herein lies a critique of some of the modern uses of conceivability arguments in relation to quality.<sup>77</sup> To conceive of the workings of the world wholly without the possibility of experiencing quality at all, e.g., as is the case with the notion of zombies found in some contemporary discussions in the philosophy of mind, is to conceive of a world where sense concepts

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<sup>77</sup> For a similar discussion in relation to Hegel and the notion of empty possibilities (*leeren Möglichkeiten*), see Adrian Johnston, “Contingency, pure contingency—without any further determination: Modal Categories in Hegelian Logic,” *Logos: Russian Journal of Philosophy and Humanities* 1, No. 2, (2017), 23 – 48.



inferred in part through our own sensations are rendered impossible.<sup>78</sup> It makes very little sense to draw the inference between, say, a bee perceiving ultraviolet and a bee utilizing that information if we had no notion at all of sensory experience—one that begins from our respective first-person perspectives—ourselves. It is also a world where the act of empirical verification through sensory observation becomes meaningless. Again, we isolate properties in understanding the world and quality itself may not play a direct role in empirical explanations. But to say that quality reduces entirely to concepts it is to overlook the ways in which many empirical concepts are justified through the labors of experience. To what degree that is depends on their possibility to be experienced or their proximity to experience. And it is because of such reasoning, in spite of his less desirable metaphysical speculations, that I state that this makes Schelling’s thinking far more empirical than one might otherwise assume.

#### **IV. I’ll Believe It When I See It: An Argument Against the Premises of Jackson’s Knowledge Argument**

Let us set aside the details of Schelling’s metaphysics and its problems. I think there are some basic insights we can glean from him in our own thinking about quality and sensation from today’s standpoint. I believe Schelling is right to say that sensory experience plays an epistemically basic role in at least some forms of empirical knowledge. Still, I wish to maintain my earlier critique of Schelling and suggest that this basic role is not so much an ontological matter about the nature of forces and so on, but one that concerns the explanatory priority regarding how we first pick out qualities

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<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, David Chalmers, “Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap,” in *Phenomenal Concepts and Phenomenal Knowledge: New Essays on Consciousness and Physicalism*, eds., T. Alter, and S. Walter, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 167 – 194.

through sensory experience. Lastly, I think there is something to both Kant and Schelling's idea that matter and sensibility are connected in an intimate way. Although they perhaps go too far, I see a connection between the two in the manners in which sensory experience can itself be a form of physical information. Perhaps these claims are uncontroversial. Yet in what follows I show a direction we can take them that maybe has been overlooked. To do so, I focus on a central debate surrounding quality in the contemporary philosophy of mind, namely the knowledge argument.<sup>79</sup> Maintaining that sensory experience plays an epistemically basic role in empirical knowledge, I argue in favor of the claim that at least some sensory experience is physical information. Assuming the argument is correct, I show how this leads to a contradiction within the premises of the knowledge argument.

I turn now to a version of knowledge argument found in Frank Jackson's 1982 essay "Epiphenomenal Qualia."<sup>80</sup> There Jackson offers us a now famous thought experiment of a scientist named Mary who is an expert in the neurophysiology of vision. But more than this, she is said to possess *all* the physical information there is to know about what happens when we experience colors. However, Mary's expertise is hindered by one crucial fact: she's never experienced color for herself as she has lived her life in a black and white room. The question Jackson poses is if Mary, when released from her room, will learn anything—gain information—upon experiencing a color, say by seeing a ripe red tomato, for the first time.

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<sup>79</sup> For an overview of the literature and possible responses to the problem see Robert Van Gulick, "Understanding the Phenomenal Mind: Are We All Just Armadillos?," in *Mind and Cognition: An Anthology*, eds., William G. Lycan, and Jesse J. Prinz, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 664 – 677.

<sup>80</sup> Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," 127 – 136.

Jackson's suggestion, as is perhaps the dominant intuition, is that Mary does in fact learn something new. This suggests that possessing all the physical information is not enough to say that Mary's knowledge about color was complete. Mary's experience of red added something informational. Denial of this suggestion means that we would have to say that she did not in fact learn something new, and this is not so obvious. Thus, since all her knowledge about color was said to consist of all the physical information there is to have, and her knowledge is now said to be incomplete, it stands to reason that there must be more to experiencing color than provided by physical information. That is, there is non-physical information to be had. This would imply that physicalism is a false thesis, for there would then be more to knowledge than physical information. Here is a simple breakdown of Jackson's argument:

*The knowledge argument*

- (1) Before her release, Mary possesses *all* the *physical* information there is to know about color.
  - (2) After her release, Mary learns something about the color red upon seeing it.
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- (3) Therefore, seeing the color red contained information that was not physical.
  - (4) Thus, physicalism is false.

Since this chapter ultimately concerns Schelling's thinking on quality, it might be asked how this argument relates to his thinking. Jackson's target is the physicalist, but Schelling is more concerned about the conditions of possibility of matter. Moreover, when Schelling comes around to saying matter can in fact be knowable, this conception of matter appears to be a holistic conception, which treats of matter as a whole as something ideal and non-empirical. However, the early Schelling we have been tracking is clear that, following Kant, for him there is a direct connection between sense, quality,

and matter or what we may just as well call the physical. Moreover, Schelling makes clear for instance in the *First Outline* that sensation for him is completely physical.<sup>81</sup> Thus, I see this potential connection between the sensory and the physical as true to the spirit of Schelling's early thinking and worth exploring.

Jackson writes, "I think that there are certain features of the bodily sensations especially, but also of certain perceptual experiences, which no amount of purely physical information includes."<sup>82</sup> Jackson goes on to assert that you could *tell* him "everything physical there is to tell" you would not succeed in saying what it is like to have the sensory experiences themselves.<sup>83</sup> What is striking about these two quotes is that Schelling would reject the first statement but grant the second. This is, again, because for Schelling at least some sensory experience just is a form of physical information. However, merely communicating this information is not enough. Following Schelling, if sensory experience as such is in fact epistemically basic then the information gained by this experience at least partly depends on having it. As I discussed in the second section, some explanatory accounts about qualities, at least understood in relation to sensory experience, are inseparable from the first-person sensory experience of such qualities. Thus, while communicating information about such experiences can impart some knowledge, the related sensory information as such cannot be wholly explained in such a way.

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<sup>81</sup> See Schelling, *First Outline*, 114 – 115; *SW*, III, 155 – 157.

<sup>82</sup> Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," 127.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

Some of Jackson's claim, I think, hinges on an ambiguity. Namely, what he says about Mary in contrast to his use of the verb "tell." For I believe his justification in some of the above assertions depends on conflating the possession of physical information with the possession of knowledge by description, or something like it.<sup>84</sup> While Russell's famous distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance has its own issues, I believe the basic distinction suggests that perhaps Jackson is leaving out some forms of physical knowledge.<sup>85</sup> For there may very well be physical information that is nonetheless inadequately communicated by description or the act of telling.<sup>86</sup> Jackson later attempts to rescue himself from this criticism of conflation, evoking and partly addressing this distinction in his later 1986 paper "What Mary Didn't Know."<sup>87</sup> However, even granting him this amendment will not save his argument. Why I think this is the case will be touched on within the discussion of my argument below.

For now, I want to consider the idea that something like sensory experience itself, as something not wholly a matter of description but something like acquaintance, can be a form of physical information. I make this argument by way of the empirical, which

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<sup>84</sup> Maybe this is not a conflation on Jackson's part, but simply the restraint he wishes to impose on physical information. But if we make explicit this qualification, altering the wording of the argument to state something like "physical information by description," the conclusion would not falsify physicalism because we can just as well say Mary instead gained knowledge from "physical information by acquaintance."

<sup>85</sup> See Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description," 108 – 128.

<sup>86</sup> Though I do not take my argument in quite the same direction, the thesis that acquaintance is critical when it comes to knowing qualities is sometimes referred to as the *acquaintance hypothesis*. Earl Conee provides an assessment of this in addition to the assertion that quality is a physical property of experience in his 1994 "Phenomenal Knowledge." My argument differs as I do not believe (partly for Kantian reasons, partly for simplicity's sake) like him the claim that knowledge by acquaintance is non-informational. See Earl Conee, "Phenomenal Knowledge," *Australian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 72, No. 2, (June 1994), 136 – 150.

<sup>87</sup> See Frank Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 83, No. 5, (May 1986), 293 – 294.

depends at least in two ways on sensory experience. First, at least some empirical information is acquired, verified, and justified by sensory observation. Second, as I discussed above, some empirical inferences about qualities (e.g., identity statements between an experience of red and its wavelength) originally require sensory experience itself. Again, while Schelling is not *per se* a physicalist, he would nonetheless reject Jackson's argument on the grounds of what it means to have empirical knowledge as just stated. Consider the following Schelling-inspired argument:

*The argument for physical sense*

- (1) Sensory experience is empirical information.
  - (2) Empirical information is physical information.
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- (3) Therefore, sensory experience is physical information.

On this picture, Mary does not in fact possess all the physical information about the world of color if she does not possess all the sensory experiences of them. As a result, only if Mary possessed sensory experiences of *everything* she could possibly see, could it then be said that she possesses all the physical information about color she could potentially grasp. This, of course, is an excessive demand. But then again is not most physical information banal and already possessed in great excess? Let us comb through the premises.

Premise (1) does not seem to me all that controversial, but it is perhaps the crux of our rejection of the knowledge argument, for there is a critical asymmetry present as suggested above. We can communicate empirical information in a way we cannot communicate sensory experience. This is because sensory experience comes by (again, something like) acquaintance, but empirical information can also come by description.

But what makes at least some empirical information empirical is the implicit promise that one, given the right circumstances, equipment, etc., may become acquainted with the source of such information, namely through the right kind of sensory experience itself. That is, some empirical information must always allow for the possibility of confirmation by the senses.

We might want to read this in the Kantian register. One may very well counter the assertion that sensory experience is empirical information claiming that empirical information brings to bear a conceptual apparatus or scheme that things like sensory experience, sense data, surface irritations, raw feels, qualia, etc., do not. But if Schelling and Kant are to have their way, they would not accept the premise of givenness, i.e., that such sensations come to us in the first place raw, unfiltered or given—ever even in terms of acquaintance.<sup>88</sup> Either way, it is certainly the case that information, in becoming transmissible by the empirical standards of the day, undergoes filtering, shaping, fitting, deducing, inducing, whatever. But at least some forms of empirical information must in the last and first instance trade in the possibility of confirmation *via* the senses. And of course, we can have bad (misgathered, miscommunicated, mistaken, and so on) information. Yet such a qualification does not touch the essential point. All that matters is that some sensory experiences and therefore some empirical information we possess are correct.

Premise (2) might be described as a plainly physicalist thesis, though this is too quick. If by empirical information we mean all of it, and we mean information that allows

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<sup>88</sup> For a discussion of this notion from a more modern standpoint, see John McDowell, “Non-conceptual Content,” in *Mind and World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 46 – 65.

for the possibility of being located in space and time, and all information located in space and time is physical, then this sounds like something a physicalist might say.<sup>89</sup> Some cautious physicalist might not want to go so far in even admitting of such a notion of the physical. But we are not compelled to define things in such a way. As mentioned in the Chapter 4, we may define the physical in relation to the standpoint of a completed physics. We can go on to say that empirical information is only the information that may ultimately be offered from that standpoint, and that any information described by a completed physics enjoys the title of physical information.

In Jackson's 1982 paper, he does not even go so far, instead referring to the physical, chemical and biological sciences as providing information about the world, and going on to simply call this physical information.<sup>90</sup> However, in his 1998 book, he is clear what a completed science involves: "By definition, *complete* science will include all that is needed, and hence it is analytic that physicalism defined in terms of it is true."<sup>91</sup> This language of completeness is also depended upon in Jackson's 1986 "What Mary Didn't Know."<sup>92</sup>

As I mentioned above, there he evokes the distinction of knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, acknowledging that Mary very well can gain new knowledge by acquaintance. However, he attempts to slip out of the problem this

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<sup>89</sup> Though speaking of location in space and time might seem like an artificial or Kantian way of framing things, the late Jaegwon Kim, in speaking against dualism, frames causation as a matter of space and time. See Jaegwon Kim, "Lonely Souls: Causality and Substance Dualism," in *Philosophy of Mind: Contemporary Readings*, eds., Timothy O'Connor, and David Robb, (London: Routledge, 2003), 65 – 77.

<sup>90</sup> Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia," 127.

<sup>91</sup> Frank Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

<sup>92</sup> Jackson, "What Mary Didn't Know," 291 – 295.



distinction raises by leaning into the claim of completeness: *ex hypothesi* the new knowledge Mary becomes acquainted with, according to Jackson, cannot be physical, for she was said to have it all.

Thus, sensory experience as empirical information (my first premise) might be granted by Jackson, but the total connection between the empirical and the physical might not be (my second premise). For instance, Jackson might suggest that wavelengths on the electromagnetic spectrum are physical information, but that the colors we experience which the wavelengths pick out are not. What this would mean is that if Mary was handed a list of all the complete physical facts, the wavelengths would appear on it, but the colors connected to them would not. Those sensations might appear on a different list, namely non-physical facts. Moreover, it might be argued that physical facts might be gained through sensory experience, but that does not mean the latter is physical.<sup>93</sup>

On the one hand, I see this potential objection as merely an issue of semantics, one that depends on how we wish to define the physical. It seems to me as though sensory experience and unambiguous physical facts like those of wavelengths share a very close relationship. Even if we say that the former does not count as physical, the link between things like the former and latter seems to suggest a correspondence so tight that it belies any assertion regarding a difference in substance between the two. On the other hand, this temptation to suggest sensory experience is uniquely different is something I am sympathetic to and clearly something with which Schelling was concerned. However, this is special status of sensation does not mean that it is epiphenomenal as Jackson wishes to say, and which would indeed render the difference between the physical and

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<sup>93</sup> Credit to Kelly Becker for suggesting this objection.

the sensory more than a matter of semantics. But if notions like the justification of sense experience and its linkage to non-first-person physical phenomena as I discussed in my second section are correct, it seems to me sense cannot be epiphenomenal.<sup>94</sup> Thus, while a difference might be granted, and while we might say sensory experience is unique in its epistemic status, this does not entitle one to any finer ontological differences, e.g., between the physical and non-physical.

Aside from this, if we follow Jackson's suggestion about completeness to the end, we can just as well claim, as I have been doing, that knowledge by acquaintance is indeed something physical. This leads to one of two outcomes. Either Mary in fact did not have the complete physical information of color, *contra* premise (1) of Jackson's argument, or she did, and this would be to accept the conclusion of the argument for physical sense. In such a situation, granting completeness, Mary already did know what it was like to see her red tomato before leaving her room. But if that were the case, Jackson's argument would have to admit that she was in possession of *all* sense—past sense but also all future sense as well. Jackson does not address this possibility. If he did, he would have to admit the knowledge argument fails to go through, for then there is no problem: Mary did already know. What that would actually look like is a different story.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Chalmers makes this point as well in "Consciousness and its Place in Nature," 128 – 129.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Churchland provides a story of something like this in "Knowing Qualia: A Reply to Jackson." There Churchland suggests breaking with the implicit ideology of Jackson's argument: "that ideology includes a domain of properties—the qualia of subject experience—that are held to be metaphysically distinct from the objective physical properties addressed by orthodox science." Churchland suggests that neuroscience may one day allow us to move from a "third-person account" of mind to "first-person" one—if only we had the "familiarity of idiom and spontaneity of conceptual response required." While this story is striking and moves interestingly in a similar direction Schelling sought regarding qualities *vis-à-vis* chemistry, Churchland, I believe, makes the fatal mistake in thinking that such a "first-person account" at the end of the day involves not possessing content but merely making a conceptual shift. Thus, on what I take to be Churchland's suggestion, Mary's knowing of red as some mysterious hitherto unexperienced qualia could be anticipated by knowing the right completed cognitive neuroscience, one that would "be the vehicle of a grand reconstruction and expansion of our subjective consciousness." Such a reconstruction would involve

Finally, the conclusion makes the move from sensory experience to the physical. Indeed, (correct) sense information confers a glut of largely unremarkable facts about the world, but it would be strange to take issue with this claim. Perhaps it could be argued from a statistical perspective that, at least for some sense information, any one data point (assuming information is also data) does not confirm anything physically informative. But neither does any one observation for that matter. Again, the idea is merely that at a certain threshold, such information touches upon the world in a real way. If it did not, we would be in bigger trouble than this argument could ever hope to deal with.

If the conclusion of this argument is accepted, a contradiction can be found between the two premises of the knowledge argument. This is because premise (1) of the knowledge argument maintains that Mary has all the physical information about color. But following the argument for physical sense, this would mean she possessed all the sensory experiences of color as well. But this contradicts premise (2) of the knowledge argument since it states Mary learns something about red upon seeing it. However, it should be nothing new to her, since what seeing red is like for Mary is just another piece of physical information she already possessed.

### **V. Mind the Gap: Physical Sense and Consequences for the Explanatory Gap Argument**

There is more work to be done. If what I have said is correct, we run into some noteworthy consequences that I will only begin to articulate here.

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tracking “coding vectors in our internal axonal pathways, the activation patterns across salient neural populations, and myriad other things besides.” Perhaps this would in fact be the closest thing to seeing there could be—though without real seeing. See Paul M. Churchland, “Knowing Qualia: A Reply to Jackson,” in *A Neurocomputational Perspective: The Nature of Mind and the Structure of Science*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 67 – 76.

In his 2006 paper “Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap,” David Chalmers summarizes Jackson’s thought experiment and states some resulting conceivability arguments related to consciousness. According to Chalmers, Mary possesses  $P$ , the complete microphysical truths about the universe, but before leaving her room fails to possess  $Q$ , some arbitrary truth about phenomenal consciousness, e.g., what it is like to see that red tomato of hers. Chalmers goes on to conclude that, “It appears that Mary may know  $P$  and may have no limitations on powers of a priori reasoning, but may still fail to know . . . This suggests that the truth of  $Q$  is not deducible by a priori reasoning from the truth of  $P$ .”<sup>96</sup> From this assessment, Chalmers asserts a critical consequence of this view, namely that the conjunction  $P \ \& \ \neg Q$ , that one may know all the physical information and not know an arbitrary phenomenal fact, is ruled out *a priori*.<sup>97</sup> This leads to a version of Chalmers’ well-known zombie argument. Chalmers argues that if  $P \ \& \ \neg Q$  is conceivable, then so-called zombies are conceivable. That is, it is conceivable that there are creatures—zombies—physically identical to conscious beings without being conscious themselves.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, there could conceivably be a zombie world whereby there is a world physically identical to ours but wholly lacking in sensory or conscious experience.

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<sup>96</sup> Chalmers, “Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap,” 168.

<sup>97</sup> Here I lean on Chalmers’ conception of negative conceivability where the conceivability of a statement  $S$  requires that the truth of  $S$  cannot be ruled out *a priori*. See Chalmers, “Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap,” 169.

<sup>98</sup> See *Ibid.*

David Chalmers, “Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism,” in *Consciousness in the Physical World: Perspectives on Russellian Monism*, eds., Torin Alter, and Yujin Nagasawa, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 246 – 276.

David Chalmers, “Consciousness and its Place in Nature,” 102 – 142.

However, given the outcome of my argument, I assert that the standard conclusion of the zombie problem must be asserted as inconceivable because  $P \ \& \ \neg Q$  on my picture is inconceivable. This is because a sensory experience, i.e.,  $Q$ , just is physical information, i.e.,  $P$ .

Additionally, this blocks at least some versions of the explanatory gap problem. On Chalmers' account, the explanatory gap problem concerns how possessing  $P$  fails to mean we can deduce  $Q$ .<sup>99</sup> And if this is the case, that means some more information must be added to our physical story in order to fill the gap so that we may explain why something like  $Q$  exists. This is echoed by Van Gulick's commentary on the problem: the appeal of it "speaks to our bewilderment about how any physical story about the brain could ever explain phenomenal consciousness."<sup>100</sup> However, by my account, since possessing  $P$  would be to possess  $Q$ , whatever that would mean, there is no gap between the two. Indeed, there is no physical story about the brain that would totally explain things. But that is because using words, reasoning through a completed neurophysiology, describing physical facts, and so on are not the same as sensing the physical.

Nonetheless, following Van Gulick's summary of the explanatory gap problem, the problem in a meaningful sense remains for us. According to Van Gulick, the problem "does not try to show that materialism [i.e., physicalism] is false, but only that with respect to the phenomenal aspect of mind, materialism is in an important sense unintelligible or incapable of being adequately comprehended, at least by us humans."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Chalmers, "Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap," 169 – 170.

<sup>100</sup> Van Gulick, "Understanding the Phenomenal Mind," 668.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 667.

This remains true for us. For even if we grant that sensory experience is physical information, which perhaps does away with the knowledge argument, there appears to remain a circularity involved in the claim of trying to explain sensory experience as such through the physical. This is in part what motivated Schelling to speculate ontologically about the nature of substance. However, as I suggested in the second section, this is just an issue of explanatory priority. Sense sometimes must come first in the order of explanation.

But if this is correct, perhaps this shifts the burden of explanation one level down. Rather than attempt to explain sense through the physical, we must now explain sense and the physical—through what? We seem now to be asking, like Kant, for conditions of possibility. A new gap opens up: now it is between our knowledge, with its sense and concepts, and the world as such. That sounds a lot like Kant's things in themselves, which Schelling's commitment to monism eventually seeks to abandon. If we are to not merely reaffirm the philosophical controversies of the past in the solutions we offer today—something which motivates this whole investigation of Schelling—the question of the next chapter becomes how to understand the nature of Schelling's monism and if it can really provide us an adequate answer about the nature of sense and the physical.

## Chapter 6: Anomalous Materials – Demystifying and Classifying Schelling’s Early Monism

In contrast, *matter* is not an *existing thing* but exists rather as *universal* being, that is, being in the mode of the concept. Since reason subjects the law in all of its sensuous being to experiment, reason itself, which is still instinct, correctly makes this distinction without being conscious that it itself sublates the merely sensuous being of the law, and, since it construes the moments of the law as *matters*, their essentiality to the law has become universal. In such a way of putting things, these matters are expressed as being a nonsensuous sensuousity, an incorporeal and nonetheless objective being.

—GWJ Hegel<sup>1</sup>

Hitherto we have made no mention of the fact that any psychological theory must, in addition to meeting the demands made by natural science, fulfil another major obligation. It must explain to us the things we know, in the most puzzling fashion, through our ‘consciousness’; and, since this consciousness knows nothing of what we have so far been assuming—quantities and neurons—our theory must also explain to us this lack of knowledge.

—Sigmund Freud<sup>2</sup>

Bombastic is an adjective that should accompany any description of Schelling with just as much frequency as protean. For instance, throughout Schelling’s early corpus, the reader is confronted with strange remarks concerning the nature of matter. Schelling will speak of matter as imbued with spirit, sensibility, soul, life, and (un)consciousness. Much of these statements amount to metaphor and creative prose. Others, however, carry implications for his evolving monism and philosophy of matter.

In this chapter, I undertake the task of surveying Schelling’s early writings on monism, matter and some related concepts with the aim of demystifying his views. As I argue below, the task is largely one of demystification because most of what Schelling is

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<sup>1</sup> Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §252.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1895), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. I, trans., James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), 307 – 308.

actually saying is not literal but nonetheless misleading. Upon doing so, I show how some of his statements allow us to understand his developing brand of monism, which we can then classify. Because Schelling's pre-1801 writings primarily dwell within the framework of transcendental idealism, my main concern with classification will be during his post-1801 philosophy of identity period, where he is in some sense a realist about matter. However, prior to this period, it is not quite the case that Schelling is strictly speaking an anti-realist about matter, and this I will also touch on below.

In the first section, in a more or less chronological order, I select key statements that Schelling makes about matter from 1795 to 1810. Though not a comprehensive investigation, the section offers evidence to refute the likeliest misreadings of Schelling while providing enough information to figure out roughly what kind of monist Schelling eventually becomes.

In the second section, I adopt David Chalmers' methodology of the taxonomization of substance ontologies and their relation to consciousness, best articulated in 2003's "Consciousness and its Place in the Nature."<sup>3</sup> I then apply it to Schelling's thought. I argue that while Schelling's thinking on matter resembles closely what Chalmers titles type-F monism (i.e., panpsychism and panprotopsychism), there are certain qualifications that force us to place Schelling within in a separate class.

In the third section, I briefly conclude by calling for an added demand to any ontology, which is that it not only taxonomize the landscape of competing ontologies but also systematically account for the purported illusory existence of each respective alternative.

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<sup>3</sup> Chalmers, "Consciousness and its Place in Nature," 102 – 142.



## I. Near the Zero-Point: A Survey of Schelling's Monism, Philosophy of Matter, and Related Issues from 1795 - 1810

The question of Schelling's monism, in relation to matter but also to a realist project in general, is not one that can be answered straightforwardly and chronologically following the trajectory of his thought. This is to say that Schelling does not just end up as a realist monist with the arrival of his *Identitätsystem* in 1801. Although Schelling's thinking first develops out of transcendental idealism, it also develops out of a critique of transcendental idealism. Central to this critique is Schelling's arguments against Kant's thing in itself. It is already here where a nascent realist monism can be found. I will begin first by showing briefly how even one of Schelling's earliest works sets him up as something of a monist and a realist.

In his 1795 paper "Of the I as the Principle of Philosophy," Schelling's monist tendencies can be said to result from a rejection of Kant's thing in itself. Schelling argues that—against Kant and other Kantians—that the thing in itself is a contradictory notion.<sup>4</sup> Though in this paper Schelling grounds his system in the absolute I, that which he claims is opposed to the I—the not-I—is not a thing in itself on his account and is in fact dependent on his foundationalist I.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, although Schelling here falls within the realm of a subjective idealism, contrary to Kant's version, Schelling's idealism does not admit of any dualism between phenomena and noumena. It is in this sense that Schelling might already here be described as a monist.

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<sup>4</sup> Schelling, "Of the I," 105; *SW*, I, 210.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 106; *SW*, I, 210 – 211.

Schelling goes on in this text to offer different categories of realist one can be: pure, transcendent, immanent Kantian, and, so he states, incomprehensible.<sup>6</sup> Pure realism, Schelling writes, “posits the existence of the not-I as such.”<sup>7</sup> Given what was said above, Schelling by his own definition is not a pure realist because the not-I is for him immanent to the absolute I. This will make him, as it turns out, an immanent Kantian realist, which he defines in this very way despite his criticisms of Kant.

Though this so-called realism depends on the absolute subject, Schelling is correct to describe it as a philosophy of immanence: the subject and object are not ultimately divided or at a remove from one another, and things as they can be known are not radically at a remove from things as such. Nevertheless, realism in this sense sounds more like subjective idealism traditionally defined in that everything originates in the subject. Still, when Schelling breaks with subjectivism, his slide into his philosophy of identity is not so distant conceptually. As I will discuss later, the workings of the transcendental subject are partly maintained by him. It is just that the absolute is no longer first and foremost one of the I. Still, his positions on monism and the immanence of phenomena remain.

Prior to this shift, Schelling tries to conceive of matter also as an outgrowth of the I. In his 1797 Fichtean essay “Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge,” Schelling states that “Matter is nothing other than the spirit *inspected in the equilibrium of its activities*.”<sup>8</sup> Here Schelling says nothing spooky or mystical, at least by

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 107; *SW*, I, 211 – 213.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 107; *SW*, I, 211.

<sup>8</sup> Schelling, “Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge,” 88; *SW*, I, 380.

the standards of subjective idealism. Spirit, as defined by Schelling, is that which can take itself as its own object.<sup>9</sup> Spirit is the reflexivity of the I or self that occupies his earliest essays and culminates in 1800's *System of Transcendental Idealism*. In these post-Kantian transcendental idealist works, matter is, like the not-I, subsumed under the transcendental subject and is considered a product of the subject. This claim is dubious but is consistent with Schelling's (amongst others at the time) problematization and rejection of Kant's own dualism tacitly admitted by his notion of things in themselves as noted above. Still, the statement is not as dubious as claiming matter is spiritual in a stronger sense, whatever that may look like.

Additionally, the word 'equilibrium' in the quote above arguably carries a layered technical meaning in Schelling's thought. The notion features in, amongst other places, the opposition of the forces of matter found in Kant's dynamics as well as Fichte's analysis of the oppositional circumstances in which the I finds itself.<sup>10</sup> Schelling draws heavily from and synthesizes the two thinkers, who were already intertwining subjectivity with their respective conceptions of matter. And importantly for his later works, there is just one theoretical excision needed from here for Schelling to remove subjectivity from matter as such. The oppositions become of the absolute full stop rather than of the absolute subject.

Moving forward in time, while Schelling will not yet forfeit his subjective idealist stance in his early works of *Naturphilosophie*, in these texts he becomes increasingly

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<sup>9</sup> "[A]s *spirit* I designate that which is only its own object." Ibid., 78; *SW*, I, 367.

<sup>10</sup> In 1800's *System*, Schelling repeats the line and relates it to Leibniz's notion of sleeping monads. See Schelling, *System*, 92; *SW*, III 452 – 454.

concerned with the epistemic basis of matter, particularly in relation to quality and sensibility.<sup>11</sup> Even at this stage of his thinking Schelling flirts with ontological claims, finally overtly maintaining them post-1801.

I will now turn to an examination of Schelling's 1799's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*. Here I further review his developing philosophy of matter. I argue that much of his language describing matter is metaphorical. I then investigate a major claim in this text that nature possesses a universal sensibility to it. I argue, again, that Schelling does not literally think that nature possesses sense. Rather, he means to say that nature is universally receptive. However, sensation proper will develop out of this receptivity. Lastly, I show how in this text Schelling reconceives of the physical, including subjectivity (as opposed to just objectivity) within his definition of the physical.

In the same vein as his 1797 essay, Schelling in his early philosophy of nature will still speak of matter directly in relation to spirit. In 1799's *First Outline*, echoing the quote above, Schelling writes, "And what is matter other than extinguished [*erloschene*] spirit? All duplicity is canceled in it, its state is a state of absolute identity and of rest."<sup>12</sup> Here the language of "equilibrium" is replaced with the metaphor of rest, "extinguished spirit," and his emerging term of art "absolute identity."<sup>13</sup> Also of note is Schelling's use

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<sup>11</sup> See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 65 – 93.

<sup>12</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 132; *SW*, III, 182.

<sup>13</sup> While the notion of identity of course becomes *the* adjective of his post-1801 *Identitätsphilosophie*, it is not always clear if this identity is one that leaves open the possibility of matter truly at rest and without conflict. Schelling changes on this position throughout his career. Sometimes he claims the absolute is always in some sense in conflict. This would mean that any apparent stability or rest found in matter (or anything else) is only something standpoint relative. At lower levels of explanation, natural phenomena can be wrought with conflict, e.g., between forces.

of the adjective “*erloschene*,” which comes from the verb “*erlöschen*” and which can be translated as “to extinguish,” “to become extinct,” like with an extinct volcano. This becomes a recurring term in Schelling’s writing, as I will show later.

The 1799 *First Outline* contains a host misleading statements regarding the nature of matter. As stated above, Schelling’s language will turn out to be metaphorical. Just prior to the last discussed quote, Schelling evokes his often-used metaphors of sleeping, dreaming, wakefulness as well as that of dead matter to speak of nature operating along a gradient of consciousness. Luckily for us, he is careful in his writing here to call this gradient a “powerful dream:” “It was certainly a powerful dream that dead matter is a *sleep* of the intelligent forces, that animal life is a *dream* of the monads, that the life of reason is finally a state of general wakefulness.”<sup>14</sup> In other places, he is sometimes not so explicit that he does not mean these things literally. Such metaphors are very likely inspired by Leibniz’s language of sleeping monads, which Schelling mentions elsewhere in relation to the potentialities latent in matter.<sup>15</sup> As for dead matter, such language was already employed in Johann Gottfried Herder’s then-influential book *God, Some Conversations* as a way to express matter as latent with forces as opposed to mere extension.<sup>16</sup>

But Schelling—neither of this period nor of any other—does not think of matter as literally alive or dead but as one of many ways he wishes to illustrate the latent

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 132; *SW*, III, 182.

<sup>15</sup> Schelling, *System*, 92; *SW*, III, 452 – 454.

In Schelling’s later 1830s lecture on Leibniz, Schelling explicitly talks about this metaphor and its relation to a “gradation” of consciousness. See Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 80; *SW*, X, 54.

<sup>16</sup> Herder, *God, Some Conversations*, 105.

potentials of matter. However, I can only fully illustrate this by surveying multiple texts in what follows. As I will show later, this varied language of matter's potential will become more explicit in later texts. Here it is worth noting that this language of potential follows from Schelling's monism and, and as I will suggest below, a philosophy of emergence that denies leaps and affirms that phenomena like sensation and consciousness arise as a matter of degree from more primitive phenomena.

What is of further interest in the *First Outline* is that Schelling links the reflexivity that is constitutive of how he defines spirit (and so in this stage also matter) with sensibility. Not only is reflexivity a necessary condition of spirit and thus subjectivity as stated above, but Schelling claims reflexivity is also a necessary condition of the experience of sensibility: "sensibility . . . only exists in the organism to the extent that it becomes its own object; therefore, the *cause* of sensibility is the cause by which the organism becomes its own *object*."<sup>17</sup> To repeat what has already been discussed in prior chapters, the cause of sensibility will fall in line with Schelling's tendency to situate hard problems in ontological bedrock or something close to it, e.g., as 'theorems' derived from ontological postulates. "*The cause of sensibility,*" Schelling goes on to write, "*must be found in the ultimate conditions of nature itself.*"<sup>18</sup> This should come as no surprise in that he says the same of the qualities, which come to us in sensation. As a result, the question of sensation and quality is connected to his thinking on matter.

It is because he situates these related issues at the basis of his ontology (or at least resolutely does so eventually) that we begin to run into some difficult and strange claims

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<sup>17</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 116; *SW*, III, 157 – 158.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

regarding his philosophy of matter. Not only will Schelling claim that quality is basic to nature, but also that sensibility is a property of nature itself. However, this also will not be a literal claim. Nonetheless, what he actually means will carry some systematic consequences. Still in 1799's *First Outline*, Schelling writes:

We can say—at least in a certain sense—that if the universal activity of Nature has the same conditions as the organic, sensibility does not belong exclusively to organic nature, but is a property of the whole of Nature, and that the sensibility of plants and animals is only a modification of the universal sensibility of Nature.<sup>19</sup>

The main task of deciphering this quote is finding out what “a modification of the universal sensibility of Nature” means and how much heavy lifting “in a certain sense” does. The range of interpretation given this alone is wide, with the most extreme and perhaps uncharitable reading being the thesis that inorganic nature, e.g., rocks, chairs, planets, particles, and so on, is capable of sense.

However, given what has already been discussed in prior chapters, Schelling is prone to offering very minimal necessary conditions for central terms in his system. Such terms end up being somewhat misleading and typically bombastic. For example, spirit as defined above is not really about spirits or the spiritual. Or, as discussed in the third chapter, the so-called magic circle of intellectual intuition as defined in 1800's *System* is merely an intuition that is not sensible but conceptual and, allegedly, arises from the subject's reflection on the nature of its own thinking.

Likewise, universal sensibility will not mean that chairs long to be sat in or that planets feel joy or that there is something it is like to be a photon. Rather, Schelling

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 117; *SW*, III, 160.

defines sensibility in terms of receptivity, which he describes as “the influence of external (material) causes.”<sup>20</sup> More than this though, he insists that receptivity stands opposed to activity in a reciprocal relation, and that organic life, which most would regard as the proper domain of sensibility, begins where receptivity reaches its maximum.<sup>21</sup> Thus, receptivity is not merely the mere property of being influenced by external causes but one that presupposes a relation of mutual dependence between recipient and cause.

And so, as it turns out, the “universal sensibility of Nature” is something fairly trivial. It is the capacity for things within nature to be susceptible to particular external causes, and for these causes and recipients to be mutually directed toward one another. This allows us to explain at least partly one of the peculiar fixations Schelling has in his scientifically inclined works: magnets. Schelling views magnets as a natural embodiment of this reciprocal receptivity just described.

In his Introduction to the *First Outline*, Schelling oddly asserts that “Sensibility is only the higher power of magnetism.”<sup>22</sup> This is not a one-off statement. Schelling insists in the main body of the *First Outline* on the “identity of *sensibility* and of *magnetism* with respect to their cause.” He spends a great deal of time discussing the importance of magnetism and even goes so far as to say that “every magnet is a symbol of the whole of Nature.”<sup>23</sup> Why exactly the magnet is so important to Schelling is not important here, but

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 57; *SW*, III, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 65; *SW*, III, 86.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 231; *SW*, III, 325.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 181; *SW*, III, 253.



its alleged connection to sensibility reappears in other works.<sup>24</sup> The point is that Schelling thinks that—somehow—the receptivity necessary for sensibility is a descendant and so a modification of more primitive forms of receptivity found in inorganic nature, starting with magnetism. Thus, when Schelling speaks of the sensibility of animals and plants being just a modification of this universal sensibility mentioned above, he means this literally.

As a result, while Schelling is not strict with his terminology, we should draw a distinction between sensibility proper and a lesser form of sensibility as mere receptivity. While we should take Schelling at his word about his belief that sensibility proper is a modification of receptivity, the notion of nature's own sensibility is a strained metaphor. Consequently, when he qualifies his statement by interjecting "at least in a certain sense," we should read him as meaning sensibility in a less technical sense than he otherwise uses.

Evidence for a stricter distinction is present in his writing. In a footnote in the *First Outline*, Schelling states that sensibility, as most would assume, belongs to organic nature, not inorganic nature. "Sensibility is for us . . . nothing other than organic receptivity, insofar as it is the mediator of organic activity."<sup>25</sup> Thus, when the rest of

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<sup>24</sup> See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 74, 90 – 102.

Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 128; *SW*, II, 179.

Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 126; *SW*, III, 496.

Schelling, "On the True Concept of Philosophy of Nature and the Correct Way of Solving its Problems," 60 – 61; *SW*, IV, 102 – 103.

Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 221; *SW*, VII, 453.

<sup>25</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 115; *SW*, III, 158.

nature is spoken of as sensible, I think it is fair to say he means this in—to be charitable—a broader and poetic way. To be uncharitable, he is being sloppy and not strictly parsing necessary and sufficient conditions. From here it should be clear the so-called universal sensibility of nature—mere receptivity—is but a necessary condition of sensibility proper. The universal sensibility of nature encompasses sensibility proper *qua* organic receptivity but also inorganic receptivity.

While the connection between receptivity and sensibility leads Schelling to make inaccurate statements, there nonetheless are some important consequences that he asserts follow from this continuity. Schelling very much believes that sensibility proper exists as a matter of degree along the gradient of receptivity. He will speak of plants as a form of organic life where sensibility completely disappears and “receptivity is near the zero-point.”<sup>26</sup> If we are to take this latter claim seriously, this would certainly make his claims about magnets and universal sensibility far less crankish than it might otherwise suggest. That is because even if he wants to say such things are receptive, he is clearly implying that they are barely so given that plants themselves hardly enjoy receptivity being, after all, near zero.

As a brief aside, I believe this idea of receptivity still being near zero even with plants implies a non-linearity in how receptivity increases on Schelling’s picture. As mentioned above, Schelling claims when receptivity is at its maximum, sensibility appears. But since receptivity is alleged to be still near zero in plant life, I take the suggestion to be that—at least measured in terms of receptivity—sensibility proper

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 167; *SW*, III, 232.

explodes on the scene.<sup>27</sup> Since nothing in nature for Schelling comes from without, I see the notion of non-linearities as probably the best way to conceive of his philosophy of emergence at least in this stage of his thinking.

Now, although on his view sensibility proper is only in the possession of organic nature, he also claims that sensibility arrives on the scene prior to sense organs:

“*Sensibility* is present before its organ has formed itself; brain and nerves, instead of being causes of sensibility, are themselves already its product.”<sup>28</sup> He goes on to assert that it is not subjects that constitute sensibility, but rather it is sensibility that constitutes subjects. That is, subjects are *had by* sensibility, rather than perhaps the assumed view that subjects have sensibility. Schelling writes:

Most readers probably do not need to be reminded that *sensibility* is for me a *completely physical phenomenon* and that it is considered here only as such.—But even viewed physically sensibility is not something exterior that one could recognize in the organism as object, but something reverting into the subject of the organism, indeed, even first constituting the latter—in a word, constituting the absolutely innermost reaches of the organism itself (and, therefore, one must conclude that its cause is something that can never become *objective* in Nature at all. But then must there be something like that in Nature if Nature is a product of itself?).<sup>29</sup>

This leads to a noteworthy assertion that carries consequences for Schelling’s philosophy of matter: sensibility is a necessary condition of subjectivity, and not vice versa. I wish to

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<sup>27</sup> Schelling in his *System* will, however, speak of the range of sensations as gradually developing across the organic world with, for instance, vision allegedly emerging later in organisms. See *System*, 124; *SW*, III, 492 - 493.

<sup>28</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 113; *SW*, III, 155.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 114 – 115; *SW*, III, 157.

take this into consideration in the second section, so I will title it as the sensibility hypothesis.<sup>30</sup>

There are two assertions to extract from the quote above as they lead to a tension in his claims. First, Schelling claims sensibility is wholly physical. However, second, Schelling claims that sensibility is a matter of subjectivity or interiority in that it cannot be made objective. One might argue that the two premises stand opposed to one another. This is because it is reasonable to think that if anything could be objective, it is what is physical. But one might wonder if something non-objective can just as well be physical. Consider the following:

*The argument for objective sense*

- (1) If something is physical, then it is objective.
- (2) Sensibility is physical.

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(3) Therefore, sensibility is objective.

But Schelling openly states that the cause of sensibility is not objective despite sensibility itself being wholly physical. Schelling's solution to the tension is to reject premise (1). That is, he believes the physical is not necessarily objective. This unmooring of the connection between the objective and the physical is a hallmark feature of Schelling's thought. Rather than revise his conception of sensibility, he opts to revise our conception of the physical.

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<sup>30</sup> Schelling repeats the sensibility hypothesis: "The cause of *sensibility* is thus the cause of every organism and sensibility itself is the source and origin of life. The spark of sensibility must have descended into everything organic, even if its existence cannot be demonstrated everywhere in Nature, for only the inception of *sensibility* is the inception of life.—Although without it no organism is possible, it will become clear in the following *how* it could be present in organic nature and yet be indemonstrable." Ibid., 114; *SW*, III, 156 – 157.

Schelling contends that the physical also possesses a non-objective element, namely subjectivity. However, given what we know of Schelling's tendency toward terminological minimalism, a subject is not necessarily something complex like a human or reasoning subject. The Schellingian subject is perhaps better understood as being subject to oneself. This, of course, is none other than Schelling's definition of spirit. This is maybe why he feels at liberty to conflate the dichotomies of object and subject, real and ideal, outer and inner, etc., where the latter terms all denote this bare notion of spirit.

Nevertheless, it seems premature to describe the so-called ideal or inner elements allegedly possessed by nature as subjective. These terms seem to pick out related but different phenomena, though Schelling is not careful with his terminology here. Indeed, it seems reasonable to think they are non-objective, but one might rightfully ask what subjectivity really means then in this thin sense. Regardless, it is also why he asks rhetorically at the end of the quote above if nature itself possesses a non-objective element. If it is the case that nature is "a product of itself" then it is, according to Schelling, subject to itself. To be sure, this is more or less a trivial assertion that only sounds like it is saying much more.

What stills need clarification is what it means in a robust sense for the physical to possess non-objective elements, and why Schelling believes sensibility is a necessary condition of subjectivity. The answer to the latter question will motivate the answer to the former. Schelling's thesis is this: sensibility precedes subjectivity because it is a necessary condition for the organic subject to differentiate itself. It is important to recall that in the *First Outline*, Schelling is not speaking abstractly of subjects, but of subjects that are biological organisms. Likewise, sensation is spoken of in a biological register:

No cause lies in the organism for its becoming disturbed. The reason has to lie outside of the organism. . . . However, disturbed equilibrium is only recognizable in Nature through the tendency toward its restoration. . . . The function of the stimulus is none other than restoration of the difference. This restoration I call sensation.<sup>31</sup>

Roughly, Schelling's reasoning is that if there is no means to draw a boundary between what one is and what one is not, *a fortiori* there is also no means by which to take oneself as an object and hence be a subject.

But the question remains: what make this process non-objective? Why is it not the case that sensation is just a matter of objectivity? The answer Schelling provides is that reflexivity is a condition of possibility for objectivity. Once again, this answer runs into the same trouble that much of Schelling's thought does in that it fails to adequately distinguish between the epistemic and ontological registers. Indeed, epistemically something like reflexivity might be required to know and engage with objects of the external world. However, it could very well be the case that the world of objects, i.e., the objective world, exists regardless of whether a subject is there to know it. That is, there is nothing incompatible with objects being epistemically non-objective (not objects of knowledge) while being ontologically objective (as existing, persistent objects).

But Schelling is suggesting that reflexivity is also native to the basic ontological conditions of the world because, on his monistic account, nature itself acts on itself. The claim is therefore that something is concurrent with the objectivity of nature from the get-go. What that is is precisely what Schelling means when he uses words like the 'ideal' or the 'inner' or when he speaks of the activity of nature as subject. And this state of concurrency, whereby nature enjoys both real and ideal aspects, is what he titles, as

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 118; *SW*, III, 162.

discussed in earlier chapters, the duplicity of the absolute. Whether or not this totalizing reasoning is valid I set aside. Nonetheless, it is very much the basis of his thinking here and going into his philosophy of identity.<sup>32</sup>

Still, it is unclear how he can make the claim of the sensibility hypothesis if he himself admits that sensibility cannot be wholly objective. Put differently, how is it that he can reliably reject the uncontroversial assertion that it is subjects that constitute sensibility? As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, his argument takes a conceptual route. He argues, as he did in the *Ideas*, that an experience of qualities enjoys an explanatory priority. Schelling reiterates this argument in the *First Outline*:

One can only *reason* to the existence of sensibility because it is clearly nothing *outside* the subject of the organism. Then on what basis does one know it?—Perhaps from the sense organs?—But how do you know that such organs are *conditions* of sensibility?—Only from inner experience. But here the organism is given merely as *object*. How do you recognize sensibility in the organism as object? This is the question.<sup>33</sup>

Schelling's position *vis-à-vis* sensibility preceding sense organs follows the line of reasoning that we could not even know sense organs are sense organs without our own experiences. Again, this might be uncontroversial at the epistemic level, but it does not of

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<sup>32</sup> Schelling is already concerned with the notion of an original identity of the absolute (as one between subject/object, idea/real, and so on). Schelling in 1799 conceives of this identity as one that is lost, where nature itself is in opposition with itself and seeks to revert back to this identity:

If Nature is originally identity—and its striving to become identical again proves it, then it is without doubt the highest problem of natural science to explain the cause that brought infinite opposition into the universal identity of Nature, and with it the condition of universal motion. What cause this is, is at the time being not yet known, but it is likely that without this cause which perpetually sustains the original opposition in the universe Nature would sink into universal rest and inactivity. Ibid., 117; *SW*, III, 160.

On Schelling's account, this opposition exists at every layer of reality, beginning with the hitherto discussed dynamic forces all the way up to the subject. This opposition is of a piece with the reflexive nature of the absolute.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 115; *SW*, III, 158.

necessity follow that therefore sense comes prior to the existence of organic sense organs. The argument for this latter claim is oblique and seems to depend on the assertion that sensibility belongs on the gradient of the receptivity of nature. But just because a necessary condition of sensibility exists prior to the emergence of sensibility proper does not mean that sensibility comes before the sense organs that one would otherwise assume enables sense. Perhaps a weaker claim could be made that sensation and sense organs arise jointly. He ends up implying such a claim later in his career, and this I will discuss shortly. Nevertheless, Schelling is level-headed when admitting that other organisms possess sensibility even though we lack direct access to their experiences. Rather, we can only infer this is the case.

Turning now to 1800's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling writes about matter here at times in a levelheaded way but also at times in a misleading way. We find a repetition of Schelling's position on matter found in 1797's "Treatise." He states once more that "Matter is indeed nothing else but mind viewed in an equilibrium of its activities."<sup>34</sup> He also soberly affirms that: "Matter is said to be without self, precisely because it has no inwardness, and is apprehended only in the intuition of another."<sup>35</sup>

There are, however, traces of a stranger position that one can glean from this text. For instance, he writes that "among the lowest orders of the animal kingdom . . . the noblest senses, those of sight and hearing, still lie locked away [*verschlossen*]," perhaps suggesting that such senses exist regardless of whether an organism can actually sense.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 92; *SW*, III, 452 – 454.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 26; *SW*, III, 367 – 368.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; *SW*, III, 492. Translation modified.



But such a reading should be guarded against, especially given his remark stated above that matter lacks inwardness. Again, his language is merely suggesting the latent possibilities of sensation.

By the time of his speculative turn in 1801, Schelling affirms the ontological continuity between mind and world. In his “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” Schelling writes: “The power that bursts forth in the stuff of nature is the same in essence as that which displays itself in the world of mind, except that it has to contend there with a surplus of the real, here with one of the ideal.”<sup>37</sup> No longer circumscribing his proclamations from the safety of the transcendental subject, Schelling makes clear that both the real and the ideal issue from the same ontological source. However, he is careful to qualify his claim here. It is not that nature is both objective and subjective without any further differentiation. Rather, he contends there is a “surplus,” a regional concentration of such aspects in nature. He will speak of parts of nature having different “powers” or “potencies,” asserting that while nature contains both subjective and objective aspects, the differences in nature are a matter of the ways its power is potentially expressed.

In 1802’s *Lectures on the Method of University Studies* (published as a text in 1803), there are a host of misleading proclamations about the nature of matter that issue from this 1801 turn. In this text, we also find an articulation of what it means for the world to also be ideal as opposed to being merely real. I suggest that this notion of ideality for Schelling can be cast in two different manners—regionally-scientifically and absolutely. For Schelling, having the right idea about nature implies understanding the structures of nature as they are. These structures, in other words, themselves are ideal but

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<sup>37</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 358; *SW*, IV, 128.

immanent to nature. That is, they not just notions separate from the world and only in our mind. Additionally, in this text we find yet another instance of Schelling's language of dead and living matter, which he employs metaphorically in relation to different potential outlooks on the physical world.

Amongst other statements, Schelling, discussing different philosophies of matter, insists that matter is not merely objective or real, but contains ideal or subjective elements. Matter has a "living manifestation," which "exists in the universal soul":

The error underlying all these views is the conception of matter as purely real. The subjective-objective character of all things, and especially of matter, had to be established scientifically before the phenomena which express its inner life could be understood.

The ground of the living manifestations of matter has been stated earlier: every individual thing exists in the universal soul and when separated from the One, strives to return to it.<sup>38</sup>

Just like his claim regarding universal sensibility, it is important not to take this statement of a universal soul at face value. Schelling was already employing this term in a metaphorical way, for instance, in 1798's *On the World-Soul*. There, he likens the idea of a soul to an organizing principle that structures the world into a system.<sup>39</sup>

This conception of an ensouled world remains in *On University Studies*, however it is only dimly expressed. There is a rationalist-style epistemological bent to the notion. This is because Schelling wants to say that to grasp this universal soul is something that requires one look beyond phenomenal reality or particularity. To think the soul of the world is to think in a totalizing fashion, one which incorporates a living, dynamic and

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<sup>38</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *On University Studies*, trans., E.S. Morgan, (New York: Ohio University Press, 1966), 131; *SW*, V, 332 – 333.

<sup>39</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "On the World-Soul," 74; *SW*, II, 382.

active sense to nature. Dead matter, then, is precisely when these things are apparently not accounted for. Such a totalizing frame he labels *the idea*, which somehow more adequately captures the dynamism of the world.<sup>40</sup> As I suggested in my fourth chapter, we might conceive of this approach through the determinable/determinate distinction. Sometimes generalities better describe, for instance, the causal workings of things. And so, such generalities we can call in Schellingian parlance ideas. It is sometimes difficult to pick apart just what he means by the notion since he uses it in two slightly distinct ways.

First, he wants to say that a particular science can go awry if said science does not have right *idea* of its subject matter. Just as with the determinable/determinate distinction, what one considers particular and what one considers general can be relative. Though a particular science may not be totally general, it arguably focuses on a regional totality and such a totality Schelling will label as an idea. For instance, he claims that psychology's (incorrect) idea of man treats soul and body as opposed to one another. How this opposition occurs depends on the angle one approaches psychology. He says, for example, that an empirical conception of man only focuses on one "relative manifestation of the Idea."<sup>41</sup> However, the (correct) idea of man—*the* idea of man—treats soul and body as unified.

Second, he wants to say that a total science—something like the science of the absolute or nature as such—also must possess *the* idea of the absolute. Here the idea is

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<sup>40</sup> This is commonly capitalized, which perhaps helps disambiguate the conception from less totalizing, mere or incorrect ideas. However, the motivation is weak since in the original German all nouns must of course be capitalized. I preserve the translator's formatting within quotes but will otherwise not capitalize 'idea.'

<sup>41</sup> Schelling, *On University Studies*, 65; *SW*, V, 271.

something maximally general, that adequately captures the total workings of the world. Issuing from his philosophy of identity, this vaguely means understanding that nature, the absolute, what have you, is ultimately both identically subjective and objective, ensouled and material, ideal and real, active and passive, etc. Such a total science, i.e., speculative philosophy, Schelling argues can also be one-sided if one construes this fundamental identity in a lopsided way, e.g., by confining the activity of nature to workings of the transcendental subject.<sup>42</sup>

The universal or world soul, then, is the aspect of the absolute that is active unfolding of *the* idea. This is the immaterial—or perhaps better said, the nonobjective or subjective—aspect of materiality. “Nothing in nature is purely material,” Schelling writes, “everywhere soul is symbolically transformed into body, though one or the other may be preponderant at the phenomenal level.”<sup>43</sup> We also see here what Schelling affirmed in 1801, namely that nature enjoys both subjective and objective aspects but that these find different concentrations in nature. From the standpoint of, say, a one-sided empiricism, Schelling would argue that such a philosophy sees knowledge only in its particularity and objectivity. That is, as individual instances of certain phenomena. The remedy is to somehow see how the world even in its particularity as imbued with concepts and ideality. What this looks like Schelling hardly treats in detail. Below we will see in his Würzburg lectures a greater effort in articulating his epistemology of the philosophy of identity.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 66; *SW*, V, 272.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 123; *SW*, V, 324 – 325.

Lastly, in this text we find yet another instance of the metaphor of dead and living matter: “[Physics], as it is today, deals only with the body and assumes that matter and nature are dead. The true science of nature cannot be based on such premises but only on the identity of soul and body in all things. No real antithesis exists between physics and psychology.”<sup>44</sup>

This might lead one to suspect that Schelling, while not believing in a literal world soul, believes in some form of hylozoism. This I will offer evidence against to explicitly dispel near the end of this survey but, as my claim has been, this is simply creative language. The notion of dead matter issues here from Schelling’s ongoing contention with mechanical physics as well as the process philosophical notion that such a physics fails to adequately describe the living activity, becoming, and dynamism of nature. These latter concepts Schelling also takes to be the hallmarks of mindedness. Though once again he does not think that brute nature literally thinks, he believes such matters of subjectivity originate as potentialities latent within these more basic notions. This so-called ensouled or living conception of matter is also why he notably asserts there is ultimately no antithesis between psychology and physics—though there certainly appears to be one (hence his concept of duplicity).

Even with this thematic rejection of the antithesis between mind and world in Schelling’s *Identitätsystem*, it is a mistake to believe Schelling wholly drops the epistemological framework of transcendental idealism. Schelling very much still believes there is a truth to the way in which transcendental idealism formulates its knowledge of the world. On the one hand, Schelling is now resolutely a realist about matter (no longer

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 65; *SW*, III, 271.

claiming is originates from the absolute I). On the other hand, Schelling still finds a place to conceive of matter through the framework of Kantian intuition.

I now will turn to 1804's Würzburg lectures (also titled *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*). I will argue that while Schelling preserves the language of Kantian intuition and some of its subjectivist inclinations, his epistemology is distinct from transcendental idealism. This is because he admits of mind independent reality while maintaining that the knowing subject brings reality to its highest form of actuality. Actuality for him, I argue, takes on a technical meaning that grows out of his monism. I go on to show how Schelling rejects a correspondence theory of truth. I briefly touch on his alternative.

Harking back to earlier remarks about extinguished spirit, Schelling states in his Würzburg lectures:

*intuition* is that by which a thing goes out of itself to other things and posits them as others in itself . . . What is really real [*eigentlich Reale*], the substance in the real, is therefore as *real* also immediately ideal, namely an intuition of the substance. The bodies of nature are therefore only, as it were, the extinguished [*erloschenen*] intuitions, the qualities, the solidified [*erstarrten*] sensations of nature. Nature itself, as real substance, is immediately also *ideal*, i.e. it is truly neither real nor ideal in particular, but rather absolute substance.<sup>45</sup>

At first glance, it seems as though Schelling is reverting to a subjective idealist stance. Qualities, he says, are solidified sensations, bodies extinguished intuitions. He speaks of what a realist must consider as observation independent phenomena—bodies and their qualities—in observation-dependent language. The implication seems to be that bodies and qualities, though not actively observed, originate from past subjective encounters.

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<sup>45</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "Würzburg Lectures," §268; *SW*, VI, 499 – 500. My translation.

However, that interpretation is dispelled by the fact that right after he rejects the idea that nature is just ideal.

Special attention must be paid to his modal language when he speaks of what is “really real.” It is hard to piece apart just what he means by the term. Schelling appears to be drawing a technical distinction between “the real” as something akin to the abstraction of brute material nature and what is “really real” as nature conceived of in a more traditional transcendental idealist sense as actual. Evidence for this claim can be found in his remarks that immediately follow regarding intuition. Reality as *intuitable* substance enjoys the status of being *really* real. In this implied technical sense, reality as actualized or really real is something therefore weakly subject dependent. I qualify this dependency because, again, Schelling is no longer a full-blown subjective idealist, but he does want to tread a fine line.

As a former transcendental idealist, he wants to argue that the subject’s role in knowledge cannot be extricated. Now, as a realist, he wants to reject the claim that nature is shackled to subjectivity. As a result, nature on his account cannot and does not cease to exist when no longer under observation, nor does it fail to persist prior to or after the existence of observers. But rejecting such implications is not enough if the implication nonetheless follows. Schelling must show how our knowledge of nature is not forever afflicted with a correlation between explicit subjectivity and obviously non- or pre-subjective natural phenomena.

Schelling titles nature as such, free from observation, as real. Such a conception of nature is what we might call in a more colloquial sense actual or real. But Schelling’s suggestion is that such usage is an abstraction in that it depends on removing the role that

subjects—subjects immanent to and part of nature—play in coming to know the world. While this implicit critique of the colloquial use of real and actual might be rightfully regarded as Kantian in origin, it is also a critique of Kantianism.<sup>46</sup> This is because the modal role of subjects for Schelling is not merely the abstract concept bearing transcendental subject but a world-historical subject, that is, a subject who is subject to the non-transcendental, e.g., natural, historical, cultural, scientific, political, etc., conditions of possibility of its time. Already in his most explicitly transcendental idealist text, 1800's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, does Schelling situate the knowledge of his transcendental subject in the wider frame of history: "History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the absolute."<sup>47</sup>

So there indeed is a sense in which Schelling's conception of the actuality of nature is subject and historically dependent. But while it cannot be denied that there is something of a weak or light correlation between the objective and subjective, as I have tried to show, the latter term is something different from conscious, perceiving and knowing subjectivity. In its barest form, nature as non-objective, subjective, or ideal involves the mere possibility of knowability, what he will sometimes title the *unconscious* aspect of nature precisely because such concepts of nature have not yet been made known or conscious. Nature as absolute, then, as both real and ideal is *the* idea of nature, the idea of a knowable totality. And nature becomes *really* real or actual in this

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<sup>46</sup> Schelling explicitly speaks of this technical sense of actuality as both subject dependent in, for instance, his *System*: "through the highest act of reflection, it [the subject] reflects *simultaneously upon the object and on itself*, insofar as it is at once both real and ideal activity. . . . If it does so upon the object and on itself as ideal (limited) activity, it thereby obtains the category of actuality." Schelling, *System*, 150; *SW*, III, 525.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 211; *SW*, III, 603.



more technical sense only when the possibility of knowability becomes actual—that is, known by subjects.

From such a conception, within his Würzburg lectures Schelling explicitly rejects any correspondence theory of truth. It is not that concept mongering transcendental subjects bring to bear such things to a given world of objects. The concepts brought to bear on the world do not chronically tag along with the subject. On the contrary, following a standard Schellingian inversion, we might say that unlike the transcendental subject who possesses concepts, it is concepts that possess the knowing subject. If the world is in fact cursed with a correlation between so-called subjectivity and objectivity, if the latter is in fact imbued with latent subjectivity, it is in the form of the conceptual, which persists and unfolds within the world.

But even so, Schelling would even reject the notion of such a correlate because he wants to say real and ideal are ultimately one. Consequently, there can be no correlation, no agreement of trends between what the concept bearing subject imprints upon the given world. Rather, concept and object are not distinct:

The usual definition of truth is: agreement [*Uebereinstimmung*] of the concept with the object, as if the concept and the object were two different things, the latter the original, the former the copy. But in reason and in the absolute, there is no concept, no affirmative, that is not immediately affirmed as such, and vice versa. So there is absolutely no duplicity in reason, but only the one, which is neither real nor ideal, but just the identity of it.<sup>48</sup>

Several further consequences follow from his Würzburg epistemology, but one is central for my purposes here. In rejecting ultimately any gap between subjectivity and objectivity in knowledge, in insisting that the two are one from the standpoint of the absolute,

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<sup>48</sup> Schelling, “Würzburg Lectures,” §263; *SW*, VI, 497 – 498. My translation.

Schelling goes on to deny the existence of a meaningful distinction between subjective and objective truth:

There is therefore no subjective and no objective truth. All truth, which is merely one or the other, is necessarily not truth, considered absolutely, error.

The same can therefore also be expressed in this way. Absolutely true is every affirmation or every concept, which is related to the undifferentiated [*Differenzlose*] as such, to absolute identity. On the other hand, every affirmation that is made only in relation to a particular subjective, i.e. every subjective concept in general, is necessarily false.<sup>49</sup>

Consequently, not only does Schelling reject the pure objectivity of the physical, he rejects both the pure objectivity and subjectivity of truth.<sup>50</sup> A significant problem is implied with Schelling's claim that in the differentiation between subjective and objective we find error. Rather than there being a hard problem of bridging the gap between mind and world, if mind and world are in fact not split, the problem shifts to one about why there erroneously appears to be a gap.

I turn now to Schelling's 1805 *Aphorisms*. Here we find perhaps one of Schelling's most striking but misleading implications about the nature of matter. In this work, Schelling briefly discusses the nature of perception and its relation to matter. I argue that, though tempting to read him otherwise, Schelling simply makes the case that perception is immanent to materiality. I introduce what I call Schelling's sleepwalker argument, which I believe implies that Schelling does not believe the material world as such is conscious or perceiving. I go on to discuss a revised version of his sensibility hypothesis that appears in this work. Finally, I touch on one more misleading instance of

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. I have opted to translate "*Differenzlose*" not as indifferent since Schelling also uses elsewhere as "*Indifferenz*."

<sup>50</sup> This rejection of any distinction between subjective and objective truth might be seen in relation to modern discussions regarding the rejection of the distinction of intensional/extensional truth statements.

Schelling's language about nature, but suggest how it cannot follow given the discussion so far.

In aphorism 72 of Schelling's work, he asks rhetorically: "how can perception be superadded to matter, if matter as such and *as* being is not yet perceptive?"<sup>51</sup> The structure of his question is not new to his career. The question is reminiscent of a line of criticism in 1797's *Ideas* that Schelling mounted against Newtonian mechanical physics. Advocating for Kant's dynamic view, Schelling asks in the *Ideas* how something quantitative, e.g., the motion of matter, can impart qualities, e.g., perceivable properties of matter.

While qualities, as potentially perceivable properties, are different from what is perceptive, it is easy to misconstrue the implication of the first quote bearing in mind the second. Schelling is once again not implying that matter *in toto* is perceptive or that perception is basic to matter in the same way he sometimes suggests some qualities are. Rather, he is making a claim about the imminence of perception and its integral part in our knowledge of nature. Following a similar line of thinking above about the nature of actuality, Schelling writes: "The whole of nature is at variance with every kind of abstraction, for instance with the notion of matter as something wherein all subjective inner life and all perception is negated."<sup>52</sup> If we are to understand perception and subjectivity, Schelling believes we must do so from the assumption that these phenomena are occur within matter. Moreover, this quote connects directly with the above discussion

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<sup>51</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Aphorisms* (1805), trans., Fritz Marti, in *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 14, issue 3, (September 1984), §72, 255; *SW*, VII, 156.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

of Schelling's usages of reality and actuality: if we are to understand matter and nature, the knowing subject's role cannot be completely abstracted away.

Within the same aphorism Schelling rejects any dualism about consciousness. The position, however, is not one of a garden-variety monist who maintains that what is perceived or what one is conscious of is something explainable wholly according to objective physical conditions, a position he already established in the *Ideas*. Taking a different approach in his aphorisms, he notes that there is an obvious difficulty in observing the perceptive and conscious life of others that makes these things observationally distinct from other natural phenomena. All we have access to are—in his jargon—the objective grounds of consciousness and perception. But what makes the latter notions distinct are their subjective character. This, he insinuates, is what makes any dualism a tempting thesis. However, as mentioned above, his position follows from something one might be tempted to label a dual-aspect monism where matter has objective and subjective elements. This would stand in contrast to a mono-aspect monism that affirms only the objectivity of matter, with perhaps much subjective confusion added along the way.

Somewhat elliptically, Schelling goes on to argue that we already colloquially draw a distinction between the objective and subjective character of nature. He offers the example of sleepwalkers:

Even the most obstinate habit of seeing mere objectivity in nature could long have been subdued by the phenomena of extraordinary states in man, in which even according to common opinion the soul has no share, for instance any sure actions of the sleepwalker which occur as distinctly without consciousness.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps it is question begging, but Schelling's point is that it makes no sense to even draw a distinction between sleepwalking and wakefulness, conscious and unconscious life, if we were not aware that some phenomena have subjective aspects. The latter must be negated in order to meaningfully speak of its opposite. This position does not, however, justify his monism, but it does support the position I have been developing that Schelling's proclamations about nature and matter might be bombastic, but they are not spooky claims that speak of the totality of matter as something straightforwardly minded or other related adjectives. This is because his sleepwalker argument depends precisely on such phenomena possessing no consciousness.

In aphorism 70, we find a slightly different comment about the nature of sense organs and the sensibility hypothesis from what was discussed in Schelling's *First Outline*. Schelling again suggests that a sense organ cannot be understood in abstraction from sensation. However, he does not make any claims about sensibility being prior to sense organs as he does in his *First Outline*. He asserts here that an understanding of sense and sense organs is epistemically reciprocal, meaning that one cannot be known without the other and *vice versa*:

Or think of any sense organ, for instance an organ of sight. In each point of its nature (*Wesen*) it is both, a being and a seeing, and yet only one. The seeing and the being do not stand to each other like factors which annul each other. Yet the organ is not mere being, in abstraction from the seeing (else it would be mere matter) nor is it mere seeing, in abstraction from being (else it would not be an organ); it is entirely being and entirely seeing. In the being there is also a seeing and in the seeing a being.<sup>54</sup>

This quote is additionally relevant because it advances the central thesis of his philosophy of identity that opposites—particularly subject and object, ideal and real, inner and outer,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., §70, 254; *SW*, VII, 155.

and so forth—are ultimately identical from the standpoint of the absolute.<sup>55</sup> Sense and sense organs map directly to this schema. Here, the eye is the “mere matter” one finds adopting the so-called objective standpoint, while seeing would be the subjective standpoint that appears to be disconnected from matter itself. He tries to illustrate the alleged identity between the two by showing that while an understanding of sense organs and sense appear to stand in tension with one another, where sense seems to be disembodied and organs seem to be purely objective, one cannot be made sense of without the other. Still, it is unclear to me how reciprocity entails identity rather than mere joint sufficiency.

Lastly, in this text we see that Schelling once more employs language that speaks of nature along a gradient of consciousness. Schelling, speaking of animal mindedness, writes: “Although in the deeper spheres of nature the perceptions are dimmer and hazy, they are unmistakable in animals.”<sup>56</sup> Again, there is the potential misinterpretation in these words that might imply that perceptions exist in all of nature. Hopefully by now, no further argument is needed.

In 1806’s “Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine,” we find the repetition of three themes so far discussed. First, we see Schelling assert his technical sense of actuality. Second, we see this sense of actuality tied into his metaphors of wakefulness and dreaming. Third, we see the language of dead and living matter with clearer indications of just what he means by the

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<sup>55</sup> This, by the way, is what makes titling Schelling’s monism a dual-aspect variety dubious—such aspects are ultimately one and hence not dual on his account.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, §72, 255; *SW*, VII, 156.

terms. Most importantly, however, we find a further articulation of Schelling's epistemology, which he explicitly contrasts with that of Kant's.

Schelling in this text is increasingly theological in his language, language which will anticipate that of 1809's *Freiheitschrift* but was already emerging in 1804's *Philosophy and Religion*. Here in 1806, Schelling speaks of the absolute as God, defining God as "being itself" and the existence of existence.<sup>57</sup> The unity of the absolute in Schelling's philosophy of identity is spoken of as a divine unity. As noted above, he speaks of this unity as one that is only actual when it is known, further corroborating my argument about what Schelling considers *really* real and actual. Interestingly, he explicitly uses the term *aktuelle*:

The divine unity is from all eternity a living, a real existing unity; for the divine is precisely that which cannot be other than *real*. However it is actual real unity [*aktuelle wirkliche Einheit*] only in and through the form. Thus being is born eternally in the form and *is* eternal, through itself, in the form which is its self-revelation, without going out of itself; for its self-revelation is its existence.<sup>58</sup>

Form, Schelling states earlier, seems to stand opposed to essence as knowledge stands opposed to being, but this opposition is not a real one following his identity thesis.<sup>59</sup> And so, when he states being is born in form, he means to say when being is known. This also explains his theologically inflected language of self-revelation. For spirit is on Schelling's account reflexivity, and since reflexivity is immanent to the absolute, the subject born of reflexivity, who comes to know the absolute, in this sense plays the role

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<sup>57</sup> See Schelling, *On the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, 51 – 52; *SW*, VII, 56 – 57.

<sup>58</sup> "We have opposed being and knowledge as essence and form; however this does not present a true opposition, for what is positive in the form is just the essence or being; and the self-affirmation is to this extent itself grasped as the pure identity." *Ibid.*, 491; *SW*, VII, 54.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 51 – 52; *SW*, VII, 56 – 57.

of self-revelation. That is, a subject who comes to know the world is part of the absolute—in this banal manner—coming to know itself. In spite of his theological language, it is important to note that this process, Schelling explicitly asserts, is precisely an issue of nature.<sup>60</sup>

Schelling goes on to link this notion of actuality to his metaphor of waking life and again emphasizes the “fullest sense” of the real: “This wonder of existence, or the divine life, recognized as an actual [*aktuelles*] and in the fullest sense real [*wirkliches*] [one], is true *wakefulness*; everything else is a dream, an image, or the deepest sleep; is neither science of God nor of things.”<sup>61</sup> What is implied by wakefulness here is the absolute coming to know itself through subjects. Dreaming, we might say, describes the gradient of consciousness of the absolute that perhaps involves sensing but unknowing beings. This would be consistent with earlier suggestions that animals are in a dreaming state.<sup>62</sup> Deep sleep, then, is the lack of consciousness within the absolute. Just as a state of sleep does not imply a cessation of activity in the world, so the implication is that the unknowing, non- or unconscious absolute objectively exists or is real, but not in its fullest sense as self-knowing.

The ontological of status of matter in the *Identitätsphilosophie* is also better articulated in this text. In Chapter 5, I argued that the 1803 revision of 1797’s *Ideas*

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<sup>60</sup> “This concept of the eternal appearing-to-another of being and form is the realm of nature, or the eternal birth of God in the things and the equally eternal reassimilation of these things in God, so that, from the point of view of the essential, nature itself is nothing but the complete divine life, or God viewed in the actuality of his life and self-revelation.” *Ibid.*, 53; *SW*, VII, 59.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 54; *SW*, VII, 59.

<sup>62</sup> In his *Aphorisms*, he also describes animals as “incessant somnambulists.” See Schelling, *Aphorisms*, §70, 255; *SW*, VII, 156.



clearly demonstrates Schelling's shift to a realism about matter. However, just what that looks like *vis-à-vis* the *Identitätssystem* was not explicated there. While Schelling now thinks matter is real, he maintains a rejection of atomism while also wishing to avoid the infinite divisibility problem of actual matter being endlessly decomposable. Evidence for this view derives not just from the republication of these arguments in the Ideas. In "Statement" he openly rejects the thesis that matter is an actual multitude.

In an Eleatic digression, Schelling asserts that the many is not an independent existing phenomenon, and that multiplicity is immanent to and dependent upon the one. Of note is his use of the Kantian distinction between thought and cognition in this part of the text. He claims that the many can only be thought, as opposed to cognized, and so is not real.<sup>63</sup> He then goes on to liken the idea of matter as a real multitude to the many as such:

As it is with the many in general, so is it also with matter. . . . That through which matter is, and by means of which it becomes visible, is its unity with the bond; you may swear up and down as loudly as you like that you can only see it as dead, [but] you are wrong; you already see only life in it, because this alone *exists* . . . That which we, on the contrary, demand of you, namely to recognize the *life* of matter and every part of it, we do not demand it of you as something that you are supposed to grasp in thought: rather, you should be set free from this your image-dependent thinking and return to the original simplicity of seeing and sensing which is itself only the immediate, magical awareness of the inner and positive [and] of the bond of your own being with it. . . . The genuine vision of the living . . . belongs to the trait of inner love and relationship with your own spirit with what is living in nature, the still and deep tranquility of spirit, in order for the merely sensuous [*sinnliche*] intuition to become a meaningful [*sinnigen*] one.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "[T]he many is in no way visible as the many; for it is only seen to the degree that it is illuminated by the one, that is, insofar as it is not many. You can only *think* it as many, and it is as such merely your thought, but in no way the real or *being*, which is only one. It is not even your necessary thinking, but rather your merely free and arbitrary [thinking]; and it is your own fault, if you don't see the positive in the many and for that reason believe you *see* it as one." Schelling, *On the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, 55; *SW*, VII, 60 – 61.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 56; *SW*, VII, 61 – 62.

This quote also advances my claim that Schelling's use of the metaphors of living and dead matter more so concerns one's philosophical outlook on matter rather than any harder hylozoic belief. Living matter here seems to be an issue of framing the apparent multiplicity of matter under the idea of an interconnected, dynamic unity. Also noteworthy here is Schelling's arguably proto-phenomenological position that this unity is revealed in so-called simple sensation.

Strikingly, Schelling here also plays off the shared root of between *sinnliche* or "senuous" and *sinnigen* or "meaningful." The English translation of the German noun *Sinn* or "sense" also shares the ambiguity between meaning and the notion of qualitative presentation or sensation. Since Schelling frames sense at a minimum in terms of intuition and maintains the distinction between thought and cognition, whereby a necessary condition for a judgement achieving the epistemic status of the latter is its possibility to be intuited, the suggestion perhaps is that mere thoughts are literally senseless but also lack sense *qua* meaning.

However, Schelling takes care to distinguish his notion of the cognition/thought distinction from Kant's version:

He who has followed this presentation with some degree of understanding has noticed for himself that this view also incorporates a theory of cognition wholly different from previous ones; and we add to this, for the sake of the comparison to be made in what follows, only what is essential.

First of all, this view teaches: that we actually do intuit the things-in-themselves, that indeed these are the only intuitable [things], but in no way can that which is not in-itself be imagined or thought as such. For this reason all cognition *a priori* is denied, of any kind, and completely; for that which is called by this name by Kant and Fichte, that is, the so-called cognition through the concepts of the understanding, is not a necessary but rather a merely assumed and again discarded way of thinking and observing, that does not even have an absolute ground in the subject, and is simply the product of a truth-disregarding, that is, nonintuitive thinking. However, rational cognition is also not an *a priori* cognition; because

nothing exists for it to which it could relate as a *prius*. The *posteriorus* must be reality; [but] only the eternal is the total and complete reality, the cognition of which is reason, so that no other reality exists outside of it.

The relationship of this view to experience, as cognition, for precisely this reason cannot be a relationship of opposition, but rather only that of an original inner unity.<sup>65</sup>

Schelling affirms his realism, making clear that not only does his subject intuit things in themselves but that is in fact all that is intuitable. Moreover, he rejects the notion of *a priori* cognition in part because he discards the concepts of the understanding. This does not mean, however, that such concepts do not exist. It is that such concepts are not brought along by the subject. A case could also be made for the ahistorical notion of such concepts as static categories always already in possession of a subject. Lastly, the notion of concepts brought to bear on intuition, Schelling suggests, does not work in his system because it implies an oppositional relationship, which he seeks to supplant with an epistemology that locates concepts within a unified reality itself. Thus, Schelling provides us with a helpful hint in this era of his thinking as to how opposition is thought: it is only thought. This means, again, that mind and world as separate is not a truthful but only apparent distinction.

Nevertheless, this is not a satisfactory explanation for why such distinctions appear in the first place. What is more, this claim diverges from his conflict ontology that sees oppositions in nature and questions the origins of such oppositions. It is not enough for him to say from the standpoint of the absolute that such conflicts dissolve. Even if we grant him this, what is interesting is why they do not dissolve at a lower level, i.e., from the non-absolute standpoint. And by the time of 1809, this question of the reality of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 57; *SW*, VII, 63 – 64.

conflict also carries ethical and theological consequences that are not meaningfully swept away with such a move.

Turning finally to 1810's "Stuttgart Seminars," we find direct and abridged articulations of Schelling's thinking on matter. Schelling makes explicit his rejection of hylozoism and affirms what I have been arguing, namely that Schelling's concern with matter is with its latent potentials: "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 potentia*, not explicitly but implicitly."<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Schelling is clear that matter as such does not enjoy a conscious life of its own: "matter is nothing but the unconscious aspect of God."<sup>67</sup> The unconsciousness of God should not mislead the reader. God, as already discussed, is something akin to nature or the absolute and not something anthropomorphic or explicitly theological. Unconsciousness here is literal. Nature and its interactions, as real, carry on with or without consciousness of such processes and do not themselves possess consciousness.

Though the above exposition is not a comprehensive examination of Schelling's earlier career, I hope the evidence provided is enough to dispel several misconceptions and misinterpretations about Schelling's philosophy of matter to which the reader can easily fall victim.

## **II. Zombies and Sleepwalkers: Taxonomizing Schelling's Monism**

Given the information above, I believe we are now in a better position to speak about category under which Schelling's brand of monism falls. In prior chapters, I gestured at

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<sup>66</sup> Schelling, "Stuttgart Seminars," 215; *SW*, VII, 444.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 208; *SW*, VII, 435.

the idea that Schelling is not straightforwardly a materialist/physicalist. Some of the legwork to demonstrate this is minimal. After all, Schelling is openly a kind of transcendental idealist prior to 1801, even when he speculates about the nature of matter or conflates the epistemological and ontological registers. Here there is really no question that Schelling is not a materialist in the standard senses. And when he does speak of the physical and treats it as real, it is not a standard conception in that, first, pure objectivity is denied of it and, second, it is treated holistically.

Given all this, I wish to focus on categorizing his post-1801 realist period where he is clear that he thinks we have access to and only access to the noumenal. I reference his proclamations prior to this turn with caution, though I believe much of this work remains relevant (even by his own account) *sans* his overt subjectivism, which is how he later reads himself in multiple places.<sup>68</sup>

In order to figure out just what kind of monist he is, I will first summarize the results that I have gathered above to put together a general picture of his thinking on matter. After, I will test this against the framework offered by David Chalmers' essay "Consciousness and its Place in the Nature." Upon cycling through the obvious non-candidates, I will argue that Schelling closely resembles what Chalmers labels a type-F monist. However, my thesis is that Schelling cannot be such a monist. This is because he does not believe in what the type-F monist calls intrinsic properties, though he gets close to positing such properties. Moreover, unlike the type-F monist, Schelling does not conceive of matter primarily from the standpoint of the microscopic, but also from a

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<sup>68</sup> See Schelling, *Ideas*, 177.

Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, 110 – 113.

macroscopic standpoint. This is his holistic thesis about matter—matter seen also as ideal. I go on to introduce a new class to Chalmers' taxonomy, that of type-G monism.

While there are many alternative means by which to categorize different forms of monism, I find Chalmers' method formal but comprehensive enough to neatly avoid some of the muddy issues around just how one defines terms like physicalism. While Chalmers' method depends on conceivability, it is neutral toward which form of conceivability one chooses to adopt—heavily metaphysical or otherwise. Moreover, no commitments to any form of conceivability are necessary. The point is conditional: given the framework, Schelling falls into one of its categories. Rejecting the former simply means rejecting the taxonomical system one uses. And adopting it says nothing much about Schelling himself. At the end of the day, I hope I have made clear what, roughly, Schelling thinks about matter. Now I want to put a name to his thoughts.

Let us take stock of the essential things Schelling thinks and clearly does not think about the nature of matter. I will start *via negativa* because it is much easier to say what Schelling is not than what he is. Schelling does not think that matter as such:

- (1) possesses life;
- (2) is conscious;
- (3) is sensible;
- (4) is exclusively objective;
- (5) is ensouled;
- (6) is infinitely decomposable;
- (7) is ultimately atomistic.

Most of these claims are not controversial. (6) and (7) might be argued to be incompatible with one another. Schelling pre-1801 avoids this issue by adopting Kant's dynamic view and treating matter as a condition of possibility. Post-1801 the issue is more complicated. Schelling adopts a holism about matter and seems to believe that thinking of matter only

in terms of particulars is the wrong idea of matter as such and is a mere thought. (4) is perhaps the most problematic of these views. I am guilty of not having produced direct arguments in favor of these Schellingian positions, and his argument(s) for this claim are worthy of its own investigation.

As for what Schelling thinks about the nature of matter, I will confine myself to what I think are his essential views before going on to explore some of their implications.

Schelling believes that the following are immanent to matter:

- (a) consciousness;
- (b) subjectivity;
- (c) sensibility.

(a) and (b) have as their necessary condition (c). This is more or less the sensibility hypothesis. In order for there to be consciousness, there must be subjects. In order for there to be subjects, there must be sensation. However, one need not subscribe to Schelling's 1799 articulation of the sensibility hypothesis as requiring the emergence of explicit sensibility from implicit or not-quite sensibility, i.e., universal receptivity. Schelling's discussion of sense and sense organs in his *Aphorisms* instead makes the issue of sense one that is reciprocal and an element in a jointly necessary relation, though this is not necessarily incompatible with his earlier claims. They are compatible in that both take sensibility as a necessary condition.

Regardless of the period, Schelling does not think explicit mindedness, sensibility, consciousness, etc., are basic properties of nature. Nor does he think these things emerge out of nothing. The basic properties, themselves in some way explanatorily and ontologically irreducible, lay the ground for these phenomena. Either way, since the sensibility hypothesis expresses a necessary condition, it need not require we believe

anything specific about the emergence of sensibility. It is a weaker claim, but strong enough to test against some of Chalmers' conceivability tests.

I turn now to Chalmer's taxonomy and the tests he introduces to help us place philosophical systems into his taxonomy. Chalmers' taxonomy—concerned specifically with the metaphysics of consciousness—divides into six primary classes. The first three (types A – C) he claims are reductive and require no “expansion of a physical ontology.”<sup>69</sup> Schelling certainly does not fall into these types. This is because his view is expressly non-reductive and requires an alteration of how one conceives of the physical.

Chalmers himself defines a physicalist solution to the hard problem of consciousness as one that views consciousness as a physical process. At least given Schelling's explicit view about sensibility in 1799, the process is indeed seen as wholly physical. However, we must qualify this claim because Schelling also wants to say that sensibility and the physical have nonreductive ideal elements. In fact, it is for this reason that Schelling in some sense grants the idea of a hard problem. This is because, as discussed in the previous chapter, Schelling argues in the *Ideas* that, like Chalmers, an explanation of behavioral and cognitive functions of consciousness do not resolve the issue of experience. And this is what makes the issue of consciousness a hard problem.<sup>70</sup>

That leaves the last three primary classes (types D – F), which Chalmers states are non-reductive, involve something irreducible in nature for consciousness and with it the requisite expansion/reconception of the physical.<sup>71</sup> Of course, full-blown consciousness is

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<sup>69</sup> Chalmers, “Consciousness and its Place in Nature,” 102 – 103.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 103 – 104.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



the last stage of Schelling's basic hierarchy since he wants to grant animals some form of sensibility but limited consciousness. Narrowing Schelling's views from types D – F will now be my main task. Chalmers does note that his six classes are almost exhaustive. As we will see, with Schelling the fun begins when we see how he slips through the cracks of what has already been proposed in this taxonomy.

In order to coax out the types, Chalmers offers three closely related arguments that all make the case for different epistemic gaps between the physical and phenomenal. One is then placed within the taxonomy depending on how one responds to the arguments. The three arguments respectively concern the knowability, conceivability, and explainability of this gap. According to Chalmers, each argument infers from a failure of epistemic entailment to one of ontological entailment. The first argument is Jackson's knowledge argument discussed in the prior chapter. The second is the conceivability argument. There is a stronger version of the conceivability argument as well and this is the zombie argument. Both of these were also briefly discussed in the prior chapter. The third argument, the explanatory argument, has not been directly discussed but relates to Schelling's rejection of the argument for objective sense above. Because each argument is closely related and two of them have already been reproduced, I will only briefly review them here. My thesis is that Schelling finds each respective argument's conclusion inconceivable in that he denies in various ways that there is an epistemic gap between mind and world.

First, recall the knowledge argument. The basic claim was that someone may possess all the physical information there is to know about the world without having

sensed, for instance, the color red for oneself. Upon sensing red, the argument claims that knowledge is gained, so not all information is physical.

As I argued in Chapter 5, because sense is physical for Schelling, one who possesses all physical information must also possess all the possible senses one can have. Schelling therefore finds the premises of the knowledge argument contradictory and the conclusion inconceivable.

Turning to the conceivability argument, the argument states that it is conceivable that one may possess the complete microphysical truths about the world without possessing some arbitrary truth about phenomenal consciousness. This suggests that the phenomenal is not deducible from the physical. The stronger version of this argument—the zombie argument—claims that it is conceivable that there is a microphysically identical world as ours but one that nonetheless lacks consciousness.

Schelling rejects both versions of the argument. He does not think one can conceive of a possible world whereby all the microphysical truths remain the same while missing some arbitrary phenomenal truth; *a fortiori* he rejects the conceivability of a microphysically identical world that totally lacks consciousness as is the case with a phenomenal zombie world. Again, such matters are not conceivable for Schelling least of all because, at least in terms of sensation, phenomenal truths are physical. It is just that they are subjectively physical.

Moreover, Schelling's sensibility hypothesis rejects the stronger version of the conceivability argument about zombies because it implies subjectivity without subjects. The sensibility hypothesis implies that subjects without sense are inconceivable. But zombies in Chalmers' sense have no phenomenal consciousness and so lack sense. Recall

Schelling's sleepwalker argument. The question to pose regarding a zombie world is in what sense one can make a distinction between waking life and sleepwalking. The argument draws its strength from the colloquial way we employ the distinction.

Schelling's point is that we understand the phenomenon of sleepwalking partly on the basis of what it means to be awake. To claim one can, say, run brain scans would shift the meaningful way in which we do not rely on such means to make the claim that someone is sleepwalking. Naturally, we lack access to others' consciousness so we also make behavioral inferences that would be conceivable in a zombie world. However, to say that the distinction is meaningful because of behavioral reasons alone is different from saying that this is how we in fact employ the distinction. Sleepwalkers on Schelling's account are conceivable because of first-person consciousness, not because of mere external behavior. The former constitutes our understanding of sleepwalking. As a result, our beliefs about sleepwalkers would have to be different beliefs than the ones zombies would appear to maintain.

Finally, there is the explanatory argument, which argues that physical accounts only explain at best structure and function, but these do not suffice to explain consciousness. Therefore, the argument concludes, physical accounts fail to explain consciousness.

The weight of the argument rests on the limits of physical explanation. There is a sympathetic line of reasoning in Schelling's corpus with the rejection of the possibility of structure and function explaining consciousness and this concerns his position that he

does not find it conceivable (at least earlier in his career) that quantitative interactions can confer qualitative properties.<sup>72</sup>

The argument also closely relates to Schelling's motivation to reconceive of the physical. Schelling holds the dual claims that sense is physical but that physiological, optical, etc., accounts (i.e., the 'easy' problems of consciousness) do not suffice to explain the phenomenal characteristics of sensation. Such scientific accounts are regarded as objective for him. But such accounts do not capture the so-called ideal or subjective aspects of experience in part because he believes such aspects reach back to primitive ontological conditions. To maintain his twin premises, he argues that the physical is not merely a matter of objectivity.

At a more general level, this mirrors the explanatory argument because it concerns the nature of physical explanation. But instead of structure and function, Schelling would say objective physical accounts do not suffice to explain consciousness. Moreover, he would question what it means for physical structure and function to explain consciousness. Following his argument about sense organs, the point he attempts to make is that the physiological structure of an eye and the functional role that it plays only can be understood in the context of sense already being presupposed as a necessary condition. It is not simply that structure and function cannot explain consciousness. Such an expectation rests on a confusion for him. It is that they already depend on (precursors to) consciousness to work as adequate accounts of structure and function in the first place. Thus, there is no gap here in explanation. What appears to be a gap results from a malformed question. In the grammar of his world, the order of explanation is backwards.

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<sup>72</sup> See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 65 – 93.

Narrowing down Chalmers' taxonomy from here is easy. First, there is type-D dualism, which rejects the causal closure of the physical while advocating for interactionism. The type-D dualist is not necessarily a Cartesian substance dualist, which Schelling obviously is not. As a type-D dualist, one can also endorse a form of property dualism. This latter position might sound closer to Schelling since it is tempting to refer to his monism as dual-aspect. However, on closer inspection he does not conform to this picture. There are several reasons why but the most straightforward reason to offer is that Schelling is not an interactionist, though he certainly seems to think that the world *appears* to divide into real and ideal. Again, in reality it is inconceivable for him that they are in fact divided. As I illustrated in Chapter 4, when it comes to causation Schelling is more concerned with the explanatory power of concepts—what we might now refer to in his jargon as ideas—which can be neatly captured by the determinable/determinate distinction. Moreover, the divide between the psychological and the physical is so illusory on Schelling's account that he goes so far as to deny the intelligibility of any causal connection between the two.<sup>73</sup>

Type-E dualism is the next in Chalmers' taxonomy and is even easier to eliminate as a possibility. It advocates for the causal closure of the physical but at the price of being epiphenomenalist about consciousness. Schelling is not an epiphenomenalist.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> “*Between the real and the ideal, between being and thinking, no causal connection is possible, or thinking can never be the cause of a determination in being, or, in turn, being can never be the cause of a determination in thinking.* - For the real and the ideal are only different views of one and the same substance” Schelling, “Würzburg Lectures,” §270; *SW*, VI, 500 – 501. My translation.

<sup>74</sup> As is standard with Schelling, a qualification should be made to this claim. Berger and Whistler note that Schelling post-1801, for instance in the 1803 republished and revised version of the *Ideas*, adopts a position which “interprets material qualities as epiphenomena of underlying quantitative features of reality.” See Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 91.

This is correct consequence to draw given the revision Berger and Whistler point out. However, Schelling is plainly inconsistent here. For one, Schelling does not redact portions of the *Ideas* that belie an

Interestingly, Chalmers offers a potential objection to type-E dualism that is quite similar to some Schellingian arguments I have described. Chalmers states that one might argue that both in a zombie world or in an epiphenomenalist's world, representations of consciousness, e.g., stating "I am conscious," lack the same justification as they do in a world where conscious experience plays a role in constituting beliefs.<sup>75</sup> Both in this chapter with Schelling's sleepwalker argument and in the last with his argument about justifying scientific concepts about sensory experience, Chalmers' style of argument is central to Schelling's thinking. For Schelling, such concepts are in part justified by first-person experience. For sleepwalkers and related phenomena, the idea is that distinctions held against waking life are based in part on the very experience of the latter.

This brings us to the last main class of Chalmers' taxonomy, which is type-F monism.<sup>76</sup> Type-f monism holds that phenomenal or protophenomenal properties lie at the fundamental basis of reality. There are many different approaches to this class that Chalmers lays out, some of which seem to conform nicely within Schelling's thinking while others clearly do not.

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epiphenomenalist position, as the prior chapter evinces. So is it the case with statements found later like in his 1805 *Aphorisms*. As discussed above, there Schelling argues that the sensation of sight allows us to constitute our belief about the functioning of sense organs. Indeed, belief constitution is different from causal efficacy, but it is also only one step away. Counterfactually, without such a belief, we could not speak of sense organs the way we do—something Schelling makes clear—which means certain causes, e.g., this very discussion, would not be brought about. Therefore, sensory justification of belief can be also causally efficacious and thus not epiphenomenal.

<sup>75</sup> Chalmers, "Consciousness and its Place in Nature," 128.

<sup>76</sup> For an overview of perspectives on type-F monism see Torin Alter and Yujin Nagasawa, eds., *Consciousness in the Physical World: Perspectives on Russellian Monism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

See also: Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, eds., *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Chalmers notes that different type-F monists can maintain different attitudes regarding the epistemic gap arguments discussed earlier.<sup>77</sup> Some type-F monists may for instance deny that the zombie argument is conceivable on grounds that they believe a complete physical description of the world (upon an expansion of how the physical is defined) not only includes structure and function but intrinsic properties.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, regarding the knowledge argument, some type-F monists might claim that if Mary does in fact possess complete physical knowledge, she might also be in a position to know what it is like to see red and other phenomena. Lastly, on the topic of the explanatory argument, a type-F monist may suggest physical accounts can explain more than structure and function.<sup>79</sup> Though not all type-F monists maintain this set of beliefs, remarkably Schelling does so, as should now be clear from this chapter and the previous one.

Then there is the question of whether Schelling is a type-F monist that believes in phenomenal or protophenomenal properties. Supposing one is a panpsychist, that is, a type-F monist who believes there are phenomenal properties that exist the fundamental physical level, strange consequences may follow. For instance, Chalmers offers the example of a possible panpsychist belief that there is something it is like to be an electron.<sup>80</sup> Schelling clearly does not believe anything close to this for several reasons already outlined. For one, he makes clear the majority of nature lacks consciousness. For

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<sup>77</sup> Chalmers, "Consciousness and its Place in Nature," 130.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>79</sup> For Schelling, this is more of a matter of what we mean by structure and function. In a way, Schelling's answer of importing ground-level ontological structures, e.g., universal receptivity, might in fact be evasive. I suggest below that Schelling might draw a post-Kantian critical limit to what can be known.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

there to be something it is like to be an electron, the electron must possess some form of subjectivity on Schelling's account, which he barely affords to animals. Additionally, the distinction he draws between overt sensibility and so-called universal sensibility, i.e., receptivity, offers further evidence that he believes what is fundamental is not actually sensible but merely receptive.

There is one qualification to be made to my claim against Schelling being a panpsychist. After all, there is not one Schelling. A central concern of different iterations of his philosophy of nature is how to conceive of qualities in nature. Both in Schelling's *Ideas* as well as in his *First Outline*, qualities are thought of as in some sense fundamental. However, though differing in terms of how exactly these qualities subsist, both texts are clear that such qualities were originally proposed in a transcendental idealist fashion and are not treated as real or empirically verifiable.

Nevertheless, his 1799 theory of dynamic actants *postulates* something like microphysical qualities, but they are not treated as real. As I have already suggested in Chapter 4, this version of Schelling comes quite close to what a panpsychist believes. However, this theory is walked back and does not feature beyond the *First Outline*.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, while his dynamic actants are offered as a means to explain the phenomenal, the phenomenal—or what something is like—itsself for Schelling is relational and requires auto-differentiation. That is, to know what something is like requires for Schelling not only that one stand in a relation to phenomena but also can distinguish oneself from such sensations. This is the hallmark feature of his sensibility hypothesis and why he believes reflexivity is necessary for subjectivity *qua* spirit. The overt

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<sup>81</sup> Berger and Whistler, *The Schelling-Eschenmayer Controversy*, 89.



panpsychist needs to tell a story as to what exactly it means—what the necessary conditions are—for something to be like something and how they could even verify such a thing. For Schelling, subjectivity is needed, but it is perhaps conceivable the phenomenal can be argued for without it. And as discussed in the prior chapter, Schelling would critique type-F monists who believe in actual fundamental phenomenal properties as potential atomists who unempirically speculate on occult qualities.

This leaves us with panprotopsyichism, or the thesis that rather than there being fundamental phenomenal properties there are instead precursor or protophenomenal properties that are fundamental to physics. Part of Schelling's thinking fits this classification, part of it does not. Schelling's discussion of receptivity as a precursor to sensibility helps illustrate how he approaches something like panprotopsyichism. Receptivity is for him the fundamental reciprocal relation of nature and overtly spoken of as the basis for phenomenality. As for full-blown phenomenality, at least on his account subjectivity must also come into the picture because what something is like requires what something is *not* like (put this way we can also see how ontological negativity factors into the sensibility hypothesis). That is why there cannot be for him mere what-it-is-likeness subsisting in the world.

As pseudoscientific as it is, it also helps in the context of type-F monism that Schelling situates receptivity with a fundamental force of nature, namely magnetism. Of course, his time's understanding of magnetism is different from our electromagnetic force, but it nevertheless offers direct evidence that he believed that something protophenomenal attached itself to a fundamental physical force as a type-F monist might suggest. Again, one of the reasons magnetism fascinated Schelling was because he

viewed it as something fundamentally reciprocal. He thought to connect this force to what he viewed as the higher-order reciprocal relation of sense because as a thoroughgoing monist he is under the impression—mistaken or not—that such basic relations share a common origin.

Daring to speculate, we may stretch the comparison (and anachronism) yet further. In the last chapter, I discussed Schelling's notion of pure qualities in his *Ideas* and noted that he suggests that light might be such a thing. While Schelling was concerned with qualities as they relate to the possible science of chemistry, as I also noted, it also seems that in some of his descriptions he was sometimes conflating what he was after with something like today's particle physics. I went on to briefly suggest that while photons were not yet discovered in his time, perhaps he would consider photons as a basic substance he sought that could instantiate the pure quality of light. It is convenient that all these things are in our time a matter of electromagnetism.

Rather than the panpsychist strangely speculating on what it might be like to be an electron, whatever that may mean, we might instead say that there is nothing it is like to be such a thing, nor is there something it is like to be a photon in and of itself. However, given enough of it in relation to the right combination of photoreceptor cells and all the other nice things that allow us to see, we happen to know—in a certain sense—what (some) photons are like *for us*. In Schelling's language, then, the photon stands in a reciprocal relation to our physiological hardware. Photoreceptor cells make no sense in abstraction from what they receive.

This also makes one of the central problems of type-F monism, namely the *combination problem*—the problem of how distributed and heterogeneous

protophenomenal properties can add up to our unified experience—an ‘easy’ problem belonging to the sciences.<sup>82</sup> It is easy in the sense that it is in principle something explainable according to the structure and dynamics of the relevant sciences at play. For example, the principles of the phenomenal composition of vision, then, become the principles of physiological optics. Once we understand the latter, we can understand how vision appears unified despite an underlying heterogeneity.

Perhaps it could be argued that there is a hard problem latent within such a conception, something like the paradox of the millet seed pile, only with photons. But it seems conceivable this is an empirical question: how many photons phenomenologically constitutes a flicker of light? As it turns out, there is no combination needed. One photon is enough for the human eye to detect.<sup>83</sup> Similar experiments can be carried out with the other senses and the combination problem is solved. Perhaps the problem with other senses or more complex visions remains, but it helps once more that Schelling believed sensibility explodes on the scene—a certain number simply makes a pile, makes a vision. And none of this implies reduction, for on a Schellingian picture the right idea of such a science requires that the phenomenal factor into the structures and functions described.

Nonetheless, there is a prodding question latent within such speculations, and this is what exactly the felt qualities of phenomena are. Sure, we might grant

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<sup>82</sup> See Chalmers, “Consciousness and its Place in Nature,” 132.

Chalmers, “The Combination Problem for Panpsychism” in *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds., Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 179 – 214.

Barbara Gail Montero, “What Combination Problem?,” in *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, eds., Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 215 – 228.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan N. Tinsley et al., “Direct detection of a single photon by humans,” in *Nature Communications* 7, 12172, (July 19 2016).

protophenomena, but the above picture suggests that actual phenomena emerge only *via* particular relations. But behind the whole motivation for type-F monism is to place such phenomena at the ground floor of reality, distinguishing them from physical structures. Placing protophenomena there instead does not quite scratch the itch. To say that out of protophenomena emerge phenomena fails to explain what-it-is-likeness. I take it that this is also something proponents of the combination problem seek to draw into question—how exactly do such matters combine to go from protophenomena to actual phenomena? For there is still a combination to make sense of: the very relation between perceiver and perceived.<sup>84</sup>

But if Schelling is right, then we are not just talking about a protophenomenal property when it comes to receptivity but a protophenomenal relation, hence a structure. Yet what the type-F monist demands at the bottom level is something closer to dangling properties. To say that such properties only ever make sense in a relation avoids the issue of what qualities are and why sensations like red look and feel the way they do. The intrinsic properties the type-F monist is after turn out to be a property of a fundamental relation. But I take it that what the type-F monist really wants are properties separate from relations—that is why such properties are called intrinsic and held in contrast to structures.

This is where Schelling does not completely fit into the picture of the panprotopsychoist or even type-F monism as such. I believe the difficulties lie in the fact that Schelling posits this fundamental relation where the demand is for further decomposition. Put this way, the question is only apparent and cannot actually be

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<sup>84</sup> It is tempting to suggest that this finds a different articulation with the issue of sense and reference.

meaningfully posed for Schelling. Quality does not bottom out atomistically as intrinsic properties. In a sense, then, Schelling's system retains a post-Kantian critical edge. Qualities as we experience them are not really explained speculatively. Looking for qualities as intrinsic properties turns out to be an ill-posed quest as we hit on the limits of how we come to know such things. Once we take into account the ontological structure of receptivity, the problem gets deferred to the relevant sciences. Qualities are explained in the sense that they are explained away as an easy problem of consciousness.

Still, this might be judged to be unsatisfactory. At the most general level, it is said the limit of how we experience quality is in a bedrock relation for Schelling. But at a more specific level, each experience of a particular quality seems to justify itself outside of any relation. This might imply a problem. For instance, the red phenomenon we sense and which we attach to, say, a particular wavelength might conceivably be what we sense as blue in another possible world. However, this speculation does not pass on closer inspection for Schelling because the things we sense and the structures we connect them to are disclosed in a reciprocal relation and are not actually ultimately separable.

The argument I mobilized in the second section of Chapter 5 to defend the sovereignty of sensation relied on making it a necessary part of our scientific explanations. But the argument just as well cuts the other way—this must follow if the claim of reciprocity is taken seriously. The objective structures and functions that we standardly treat as the proper domain of the sciences are also necessary to the sensations we attach to them. So, while it is conceivable—merely thinkable—that the sensation of red can be detached from any relation, e.g., its wavelength, and replaced with blue, this is illusory on Schelling's account. Structure and quality only appear to be separate.

This also distinguishes him from the type-F monist. Chalmers suggests that there is a trace of dualism in the class because there is a duality posited between structure on the one hand and (proto)phenomenal properties on the other hand.<sup>85</sup> Yet Schelling spills a lot of ink distancing himself of such dualisms while nonetheless acknowledging their appearance. This is where Schelling's philosophy of identity does some lifting, though not quite heavy enough in that it lacks a robust epistemology.

The case he wishes to make is that we merely think various gaps, divides, and separations between real and ideal. However, proper cognition does not divide the two. This is also why, though strange, he has a holistic thesis about the nature of matter and denies matter as an actual multitude. Matter in its particularity is only a thought. It is subject ultimately to forces that lack particularity, and these forces themselves are subject to the absolute, though this latter claim seems to be far less helpful at a scientific level and is perhaps a great flaw of this era of his thinking.

This brings us to the question of where to place Schelling since he does not quite fit the bill of a type-F monist. While there are six main classes Chalmers reviews, he does state there are others, though some are not taken seriously in that they are non-naturalistic. For instance, he posits type-I monism where 'I' is for idealism of the Berkelyan sort.<sup>86</sup> Chalmers writes that it shares some aspects with type-F monism though instead of positing microscopic (proto)phenomena, there are macroscopic ones constituted by the mind. On the one hand, Schelling leans toward something like this macroscopic conception of matter, though without the total mind-dependency of

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<sup>85</sup> Chalmers, "Consciousness and its Place in Nature," 130.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

Berkeley. On the other hand, Schelling also retains aspects of the microscopic speculations of a type-F monist, which he nonetheless holds critically at arm's length.

There is nothing less exciting than a philosopher coining a neologism. But in this instance, I think there is a case for a new class. After F is G, and this is what I suggest Schelling is: a type-G monist. The type-G monist is a realist or at least dares to speculate about the nature of matter while (attempting) to avoid the pitfalls of pre-critical philosophizing. Under type-G monism, matter exists but it is something spoken of both in the register of the conceptual, i.e., as ideal, and of the objective, i.e., as real. As a result, the type-G monist straddles a fence, being a realist about the possibility of a kind of compatibility between the macroscopic and microscopic standpoints on matter. Like the type-F monist, for the type-G monist there is a truth to the microscopic intrigue surrounding matter and its related scientific sympathies. At the same time, while matter is not merely mind-dependent as a type-I monist would maintain, the type-G monist might say matter is in some sense mind or idea inflected. But unlike the mind inflected conception of matter of the type-F monist, which seeks the (proto-)mental in the microscopic, the type-G monist argues that the macroscopic, as idea or generality, plays a role at least for some properties we attribute to matter.

In this way, we might consider categorizing the absolute or objective forms of idealism in general as variations of type-G monism, at least when it comes to matter. And as applied to Schelling specifically, we can fill in the blanks of this class in the way he rejects both the infinite divisibility of matter as well as atomism while nevertheless taking an interest in (tentatively) fundamental particles. Additionally, he holds that there are certain physical properties of matter that he considers primitively relational as well as

subjective and thus as ideal. This, again, is because the physical for him possesses a kind of subjectivity or ideality and is not merely a fetishization of objects. And these ideal elements are not something that totally shackle matter to mind.

While nonetheless admitting to the existence of matter, the regime of type-G monism legislates that certain limits are hit upon when speculating about matter. Given the post-Kantian critical bent of such monists, one of the main aims of type-G monism is to show how other classifications rest on ill-posed and uncritical premises while attempting to incorporate the truth embedded in competing standpoints. As a result, critics of the type-G monist might argue that the latter wants all of the flavor but none of the calories of some of the other views on matter. Indeed, the type-G monist might not play the game of speculation in the same way as other views. Thus, the type-G monist may be perceived as failing to resolve many of the issues that other classifications seek to address or are themselves faulted for not having addressed.

Ironically, while this brand of monism is speculative, its finest speculative moments come by way of the conceptual analysis and the critique of other views. Yet, as if so often overlooked in Kantian and post-Kantian thought, the type-G monist is tasked not only with critiquing other views, but also with developing a thorough enough system so as to explain why the other standpoints mistakenly appear as they do, as illusions within a superior philosophy. This attempt, though not thorough, is illustrated in Schelling's critiques of atomism, occult qualities, and the infinite divisibility problem and the ways in which he is partially sympathetic to some of these notions, trying to explain how such philosophical tendencies can be understood within his own system. Last but not least, the G of type-G monism conveniently stands for *Geist*.



### III. Conclusion: Amphiboly of the Concepts of Matter

It is not enough for Schelling to state that other views only appear plausible but are in fact illusory. The work of critique demands not only a framework that refutes other positions but neatly locates their errors as plausible outcomes within the structures of a greater system. The strength of the heliocentric model of our solar system, for example, rested not only on its predictive power but also on its ability to explain why things appear otherwise. In this way, Kant's own Copernican revolution carries with it more than one meaning.

Kant sought to demonstrate how philosophizing, like with the observations of astronomy, is standpoint dependent. He constructed his transcendental idealism in part out of this thesis. But in doing so, he also mobilized his system in order to account for popular but mistaken competing views. Kant's Transcendental Dialectic is well-regarded in this respect, but there is arguably a more exciting piece in his First Critique and that is in the much-overlooked appendix to the Transcendental Analytic: the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection.<sup>87</sup>

In this appendix, Kant employs his just established framework of transcendental idealism against the philosophies of Leibniz and Locke, mounting a system-internal critique. Kant argues that each philosopher in their respective ways commits an amphiboly, or the act of confounding "an object of pure understanding with

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<sup>87</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A260 – A292/ B316 – B349.

See also: Andrew Brook and Jennifer McRobert, "Kant's Attack on the Amphiboly of the Concepts of Reflection," in *Theory of Knowledge*, (August 1998), <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/TKno/TKnoBroo.htm>.

appearance.”<sup>88</sup> Kant states that Leibniz commits an amphiboly by intellectualizing sensations and Locke by sensationalizing concepts. This generalized procedure of surveying the relationship between our forms of knowledge and their representations Kant calls Transcendental Deliberation. I think this kind of methodology should be taken seriously even for non-transcendental idealist systems. But not only this, I suggest, where possible, one layout the permutations of other possible amphibolies one can generate according to one’s system.

Perhaps it is putting the cart before the horse, but an adequate ontology should, if not follow Chalmers’ taxonomy, offer at least some of the possible views such a taxonomy describes. The reason being that some of these systems seem to reach out to perennial ontological temptations, which suggests to me that their (re)appearance rests not just on innocent, free-floating observational or conceptual errors, but ones that grow out of the nature of our standpoint. What that nature is depends on the system, but what I want to say is that it is not enough for one to be, say, a type-A materialist. One must also show how type-A materialism accounts for other types internal to its own thinking. Moreover, the type-A materialist must also show why the view itself is not immediately philosophically and empirically obvious. What should result is something of a critical taxonomy, one that not only categorizes but also explains away other views utilizing the power of its own framework.

This demand, however, when applied to philosophy and taken to its limit itself leads to perhaps an undesirable consequence. As noted above, when Schelling speaks of his notion of *the idea* in 1802’s *University Studies*, he is quick to note—doing a kind of

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<sup>88</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A270/B326.

transcendental deliberation in sketch form—that some philosophies might basically capture the right picture of the absolute just in a lopsided way. Taken a step further, it might be the case that there are many different ways to realize concepts of matter as they relate to nature and mindedness. This would not only mean that it is perhaps possible that an adequate picture of consciousness can be captured—hard problems resolved or dissolved and all—in different systems. But it could also mean that ontologies and their conceptions of matter themselves in different ways can potentially make adequate sense of consciousness. Put differently, it could very well be the case that the project of ontology as it relates to consciousness might itself be multiply realizable.<sup>89</sup>

I am tempted to say this would be akin to different axiomatic systems of geometry being able to prove in their respective ways things like the Pythagorean theorem. Rather than this being a dismissal of Schelling's foundationalist and axiomatic inclinations, it is an expansion of it and perhaps its logical outcome. This amounts perhaps to yet another dialectical trick, whereby the demand for axioms leads precisely to the enfeebling of its importance.

Moreover, we might therefore ask how warranted the elegance of Chalmers' taxonomy is in that it neatly divides ontologies according to its differing first principles and differing standpoints on his conceivability arguments. Maybe first principles do not even matter that much and that once we find a set of systems that get the basic answers right about the conceivability arguments, narrowing down the species of systems matters a lot less because many might do the job of solving the hard problem of consciousness.

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<sup>89</sup> See Hilary Putnam, "Psychological Predicates", in *Art, Mind, and Religion*, W.H. Capitan and D.D. Merrill eds., (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1967), 37 – 48.

This leads once more to something undesirable to consider: given a choice between ontologies that get us to the same place, how do we choose?

In the First Introduction to his *Science of Knowledge*, Fichte confronted something like this question, where he saw the stakes being argued over between the idealist and the so-called dogmatist, which we might more charitably label a materialist. Fichte rejected a principle of choice, insisting instead that there is no chain of reasoning to offer because it was a matter of the beginning of the chain and a confrontation of our own freedom of thought. “What sort of philosophy one chooses depends,” Fichte wrote, “therefore, on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we can reject or accept as we wish it; it is rather a thing animated by the soul of the person who holds it.”<sup>90</sup> If philosophy could actually get to this point, it would first require not only one system that scratches our itch, but many.

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<sup>90</sup> Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, 16.

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