

*Inverted Identities:*

**F.W.J. Schelling's Philosophies of Nature and of Spirit**

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## Abstract

The pivot of this thesis is F.W.J. Schelling's (1775-1854) proposition that Nature is to be conceived as visible Spirit, and Spirit as invisible Nature. In light of Schelling's distinction, this thesis will attempt to restate the purposes of Schelling's *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism in light of one another. My contention is that Schelling's early philosophy is generally concerned with the nature of manifestation and specifically with the manifestation of the Absolute according to the dual aspects of Nature and Spirit. Schelling explains *manifestation* as a process or transition from a state of infinite activity or productivity to finite product. To demonstrate this point, I will consider Schelling's ideas, first, on the possibility and manifestation of Nature (Chapter I) and, second, on the possibility and manifestation of Spirit (Chapter II). In exploring the former, I will concentrate on the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799); in terms of the latter, I will focus on the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). Grounding my interpretation in Schelling's proposition concerning the visibility and invisibility of Nature and Spirit, in the Conclusion I will interpret Nature and Spirit as *inverted identities*, i.e. as a bond of opposing organic and spiritual potencies, and outline how each identity is directed toward manifesting the Absolute according to its own inner necessity. By interpreting Nature and Spirit in this way, I attempt to show that their purposes are to manifest their counterpart as an expression of the Absolute—the underlying original identity.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# 1. Introduction

## The Inverted Identities of the Absolute: Of Nature and Spirit

For we wish not that nature coincide *accidentally* with the laws of our spirit (for instance through the mediation of a *third principle*), but that *nature itself* necessarily and originally not only *express*, but *itself realize* the laws of our spirit, and that it be nature and be called nature only to the extent that it does this. Nature shall be visible spirit, and spirit invisible nature. *Here* in the absolute identity of spirit *within* us and nature *outside* us the problem of how a nature outside us is possible must be solved<sup>1</sup>.  
–F.W.J. Schelling (1797)

The pivot of this thesis is F.W.J. Schelling’s (1775-1854) proposition that Nature is to be conceived as visible Spirit, and Spirit as invisible Nature<sup>2</sup>. In light of Schelling’s distinction, this thesis will attempt to restate the purposes of Schelling’s *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism in light of one another. My contention is that Schelling’s early philosophy is generally concerned with the nature of manifestation and specifically with the manifestation of the Absolute according to the dual aspects of Nature and Spirit. Schelling explains *manifestation* as a process or transition from a state of infinite activity or productivity to finite product. To demonstrate this point, I will consider Schelling’s ideas, first, on the possibility and manifestation of Nature (Chapter I) and, second, on the possibility and manifestation of Spirit (Chapter II). In exploring the former, I will concentrate on the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799)<sup>3</sup>; in terms of the latter, I will focus on the *System of Transcendental Idealism*

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<sup>1</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, “Introduction to Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an Introduction to the Study of This Science, Second Edition 1803,” trans. Priscilla Hayden-Roy. In *Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling: Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1987), 202.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</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).

(1800)<sup>4</sup>. Grounding my interpretation in Schelling's proposition concerning the visibility and invisibility of Nature and Spirit, I will interpret Nature and Spirit as *inverted identities*, i.e. as a bond of opposing organic and spiritual potencies, and outline how each identity is directed toward manifesting the Absolute according to its own inner necessity. By interpreting Nature and Spirit in this way, I attempt to show that their purposes are to manifest their counterpart as an expression of the Absolute—the underlying original identity. I thus argue that Schelling's early philosophy represents a theory in which the objective and the subjective are both necessary for the possibilities of self and world.

As will be explored, that which defines Nature *as such* also defines Spirit, albeit in inverse proportion<sup>5</sup>; they are, in a sense, inverse productivities inclined toward manifestation from opposite ontological trajectories: from the objective to the subjective in Nature's case, and from the subjective to the objective in Spirit's case. It is as if each one—Nature and Spirit—must ground itself in an ontologico-epistemological aspect—either subjectivity or objectivity—in order to manifest. Furthermore, because Nature and Spirit begin in objectivity and subjectivity, respectively, and move toward manifesting the opposite, both are to be understood as in one sense visible and in another sense invisible, depending on the perspective from which they are considered. From the vantage point of Nature, Spirit, or the self, is a derivation of Nature; it is Nature's product. Inversely, from the vantage point of Spirit, Nature is the product of the former's *odyssey* to seek itself through three distinct "epochs"<sup>6</sup>. The purpose of defining Nature and Spirit as *inverted*

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<sup>4</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Schelling, "Introduction to Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature," 202.

<sup>6</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 232.

*identities* is twofold. First, I believe it shows that Schelling's early philosophy is primarily concerned with the possibility and nature of manifestation, as both *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism are grounded in a base productivity which seeks to make itself a product. In effect, Schelling outlines the process and possibility of manifestation from two different perspectives; in so doing, he effectively constructs two seemingly disparate philosophies. Hence the second purpose in arguing that Nature and Spirit are *inverted identities*: to explore the possibility that although disparate and constructed separately, *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism compose a working unity, which, I contend, Schelling tries to work out, if only in outline, in his 1801 treatise, *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*. If the goal of Schelling's early philosophy is to identify the necessary conditions for the possibility of the Absolute's manifestation, then Schelling understands the process as one in which invisible things become visible and visible things are somehow rendered invisible, again, according to the aspects of Nature and Spirit. In this respect, the early philosophies represent an overarching theory of the conditions for the possibility of organic and spiritual transmutation. This is what makes Schelling's early philosophy fundamentally *transcendental*; it is concerned with articulating the *conditions for the possibility* of Nature and Spirit, not with the empirical world *as such*.

In the year 1801, Johann Fichte (1762-1814) wrote to Schelling regarding one of the latter's recent publications on idealism: "[...] your claim in the *Philosophische Journal* concerning two philosophies, one idealistic, one realistic, both of which are true, and could stand next to one another, which I immediately opposed because I saw it to be



wrong, lead me to think that you had not penetrated the *Wissenschaftslehre*<sup>7</sup>.” As Fichte identifies, by 1801 Schelling had undertaken a philosophical project concerned with two primary objects of inquiry: on one hand, Nature, constructed through what Schelling called *Naturephilosophy* (*Naturphilosophie* in German), and, on the other, the self and Spirit, constructed through transcendental idealism (alternatively, *ideal-realism*). Both philosophies begin from a postulate of unconditioned productivity. As such, *productivity* is the postulate of Schelling’s early philosophy *in toto*; as we will see, it drives the emergence and development of both natural and spiritual systems. Furthermore, the concept of productivity is necessary, ontologically and epistemologically, in order to account for how a product or object is *possible* both materially and ideally given its origination from infinite activity.

In seeking material and ideal conditions, Schelling’s principal philosophical concern is the problem of how the infinite is connected with the finite. The transition of the infinite to the finite is to be understood as a process both of manifestation and transmutation<sup>8</sup>; and the notion of inversion underlying the relation between Nature and Spirit suggests that during the transition of the infinite what is invisible becomes visible and, conversely, what is visible is made invisible. For Schelling, visibility means not merely becoming physically and materially manifest or real (the invisible becoming visible) but becoming transcendently known as well (the visible becoming invisible). As this thesis will outline in Chapters I and II, the dynamic process which produces the

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<sup>7</sup> Dalia Nassar, “From a Philosophy of Self to a Philosophy of Nature: Goethe and the Development of Schelling’s *Naturephilosophy*,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 92 (3) (2010): 305.

<sup>8</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism,” In *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 177.

Absolute's manifestation, both as Nature and Spirit, occurs through distinct "stages" or "epochs," considered schematically. Ontologically, these stages or epochs are simultaneous and overlapping, defining both Nature and Spirit as networks of interdependent forces or potencies. Thus, relating *Naturephilosophy* to transcendental idealism, Nature *appears* as a visible manifestation of Spirit, and Spirit is revealed through Nature's objectivity. Furthermore, the bond between Nature and Spirit is revealed with particular potency in the form and disposition of human being. Through human being, Nature and Spirit coordinate themselves toward manifesting and understanding things seen and unseen, things visible and invisible. Schelling thus asserts that as a part of Nature the human being signifies the moment of reflection in which Nature comes to know itself as Spirit, and Spirit knows itself as Nature. This process is really undertaken in the name of the Absolute. For this reason, the human being appears as a kind of instrument of the Absolute, a cycling of ideal and real potencies which, at times, reveal but also conceal the nature of the Absolute (Identity).

Nature and Spirit's respective productivities are not to be understood as industrial or anthropomorphic, seeking a particular purpose (*telos*) beyond manifestation; their basic purpose is to manifest aspects of the Absolute. As we will explore, because all products are only approximations of the Absolute, Nature and Spirit are inwardly and outwardly directed toward the goal (*telos*) of *manifestation*. To an extent then, this thesis gestures toward a middle ground, an invisible point of convergence, between *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism. In so doing, it seeks to identify a unity between the two while, at the same time, attempts to honour the paradox that the two philosophies, as they are separately articulated, appear along parallel axes that may never intersect. Schelling's

dictum that Nature be visible Spirit and Spirit invisible Nature preserves an ineffaceable difference between the two, which claims that neither can properly exist without the other. The implication of Schelling's twofold philosophy thus seems to be that through the material manifestation of Nature, Spirit acquires a concrete vessel—a *spatiotemporal location*—in which to emerge and in which to remain contained and expressed<sup>9</sup>.

Secondly, the self and self-consciousness account for the emergence of Nature's dormant, latent and unconscious potency. Thus two perspectives on the Absolute emerge, which remain in permanent tension with one another, contradicting and complementing one another. Perhaps then Nature and Spirit should be grasped, as I believe Schelling intended, as *inverted identities*, or inverted potencies, existing in contrary proportions of potency. This means that each one has a share in the task of manifesting the Absolute—the infinite revealed in the finite. And although both Nature and Spirit seem to accomplish this on their own terms, i.e. from objectivity to subjectivity in the case of Nature and from subjectivity to objectivity in the case of Spirit, the one is not possible without the other; a trace of the other is contained in each one. The postulate of productivity coupled with the law of polarity, or dialectic, define Nature's *realizing* productivity and Spirit's *idealizing* productivity. Furthermore, these mutually-occurring processes require two different philosophical approaches, namely *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism, in order to properly recount the story, as far as philosophy is able to tell it, of the Absolute's becoming in the forms of Nature and Spirit. It is important to bear in mind that because Schelling's early philosophy is transcendental in orientation it

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom* (Albany: State University of New York, 2011), 125.

seeks to account for the reality of Nature and Spirit *as* possibility. Thus, as was stated at the beginning of this introduction, Schelling's early philosophy is concerned with the *a priori* conditions or first principles for the possibility of Nature and Spirit. Thus, when this thesis discusses an actual or external world, it means that which is necessary for *the possibility of world*.

An outline of the thesis follows. In Chapter I, I outline in some detail Schelling's conception of Nature as unconditioned productivity, focusing on the transition of Nature's infinite activity (*natura naturans*) to Nature's finitude in the form of organic products and phenomena (*natura naturata*). I present Schelling's conception of Nature as a kind of process or continuous sequence through which infinite productivity is transformed into finite product—moving from objectivity to subjectivity and culminating with the product of human self-consciousness. This process comprises approximately seven distinct “stages” or “phases” which occur simultaneously, producing phenomena in dynamic, teleological fashion. I argue that Nature's manifestation is grounded in three conditions of which the first is also the postulate of *Naturephilosophy*: 1) the postulate and condition of unconditionedness of Nature, or unconditioned activity; 2) the condition of the law of polarity; and 3) the condition of the actant or potency. In Chapter II, I make the argument that Spirit's odyssey toward self-consciousness and self-knowledge mirrors the manifestation of Nature, albeit from the vantage point of the absolute self, moving from a state of unconsciousness to consciousness to self-consciousness. For Schelling, the self progresses toward a deeper sense of itself by passing through three “epochs”; throughout this process, Nature is posited by the self as another power against which the self strives

in order to *bring forth* (manifest) its own inner necessity<sup>10</sup>. Similar to Nature, I argue that Spirit's manifestation is grounded in four conditions of which the first is also the postulate of transcendental idealism: 1) the postulate and condition of unconditionedness of Spirit, or eternal becoming (the self as activity); 2) the condition of the dialectic of self and not-self, or the freedom and necessity of the self; 3) the condition of the twofold series of actions, the necessary and the free; and 4) the condition of the epochs of selfhood (*the Odyssey of Spirit*). In the Conclusion, I will explain why Nature and Spirit should be conceived as *inverted identities* relative to one another and consider the complementarity of *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism by looking briefly at Schelling's treatise *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801). Finally, an appendix has been included which presents a brief comparison of Schelling's philosophy with that of G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831).

### **1.1 Schelling's Philosophical Career and a Review of Recent Scholarship in English**

Before we move into the body of the thesis, a brief look at the stages of Schelling's philosophical career may assist the reader in situating the present work; to this end, a literature review of seven titles of English scholarship on Schelling is presented. Finally, I have also included a note on why I decided to focus on Schelling's early philosophy.

Historically, Schelling has often been received and interpreted as no more than a stepping stone between the Subjective Idealism of Johann Fichte and the Absolute Idealism of G.W.F. Hegel<sup>11</sup>. This position tends to downplay Schelling's influence on

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<sup>10</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

Hegel and fails to treat Schelling's philosophy in itself reading it only in reference to other philosophers. Moreover, the position that Schelling was only an intermediary between Fichte and Hegel limits Schelling to a brief period of his long philosophical career, which spanned more than 60 years beginning roughly in 1793 and ending only with his death in 1854. Schelling's broader philosophical career has been ignored in part because he was early on passed off as a protean thinker, never one to close and complete a full philosophical *system*<sup>12</sup>. Hegel himself wrote, "Schelling worked out his philosophy in view of the public [...] If we ask for a final work in which we shall find his philosophy represented with complete definiteness none such can be named"<sup>13</sup>. This passage in itself does not dismiss Schelling's contribution to the history of philosophy but it gives some indication of how Schelling's philosophy was eventually regarded and why until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was largely ignored, especially in the English-speaking world. It is true that Schelling never completed a philosophical system; however, it is demonstrably the case that Schelling consistently explored and questioned certain themes, leitmotifs and ideas, which recur throughout his corpus. These include polarity, identity, Nature, Spirit, the Absolute, realism and idealism, as well as the relation between the infinite and the finite. Schelling's approach to and thinking of these themes and ideas varied over the course of his philosophical career; in order to demarcate these variations scholars have tended to divide Schelling's philosophical work into different periods.

Opinions of the number of periods in Schelling's philosophy differ, as do interpretations of what defines each period and how each one should be read both in itself

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>13</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume Three*, ed. and trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 513.

and in relation to the others. However, the dominant opinion, or at least most established, traceable to Manfred Schröter<sup>14</sup>, is that Schelling's philosophy should be divided into and interpreted according to three periods: the early, middle and late. The early Schelling, spanning from 1793 to 1806, includes writings influenced by Fichte's philosophy, especially the latter's concept of the self, the philosophy of nature designated in German as *Naturphilosophie*, transcendental idealism and the Identity-philosophy (*Identitätphilosophie*). The middle Schelling, spanning from 1806 to 1821, is often qualified as a "philosophy of freedom" and shows a marked turn toward theological and theosophical concepts, as well as a greater concern for a kind of realism grounded in existence rather than in *a priori* principles of knowledge. The middle period is typically identified as beginning in 1806, which is when Schelling moved from Würzburg to Munich and where he met the Christian theosophist Franz von Baader (1765-1841). However, there are some signs of the middle period as early as 1804, when Schelling published his treatise *Philosophy and Religion* in which he redefines the finite as a *falling-away* (*Abfall*) from the infinite<sup>15</sup> and shows a newfound interest in the religious. Finally, the late Schelling, spanning 1821 to the philosopher's death in 1854, includes an attack on Hegel through Schelling's formulation of what he called "positive philosophy." The latter is contrasted with Hegel's philosophy, as well as Schelling's own early philosophy, both of which are qualified as "negative philosophies." In brief, positive philosophy attempts to make an account of being from within existence, i.e. beginning

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<sup>14</sup> S.J. McGrath, *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 38n1.

<sup>15</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy and Religion* (1804), trans. Klaus Ottmann, (Putnam: Spring Publications, 2010), 26.

from the real, rather than from principles and concepts. Alternatively, we might say, while negative philosophy attempts to construct reality and the Absolute from the *a priori*, positive philosophy takes as its starting point the *a posteriori*. The positive philosophy also included a *Philosophy of Revelation* and a *Philosophy of Mythology*, which, during Schelling's lifetime, were presented publicly as lectures at the University of Berlin where Schelling was called in 1842 and where he remained until 1846.

Schelling's philosophy has received greater attention in the last 20 to 30 years with a resurgence of materialistic metaphysics, notably in the forms of Speculative Realism and Materialism. Moreover, Gilles Deleuze's (1925-1995) move away from transcendental approaches to philosophy has also been particularly influential in this regard, as has Iain Hamilton Grant's book *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*<sup>16</sup>, published in 2006. Both Deleuze and Grant's philosophical work highlight how some contemporary trends in philosophy draw from natural science, especially biology, chemistry and geology, and how an investigation of Nature, in particular, is not in fact an impediment to the ever-demanding questions concerning *first principles*. A brief review of some secondary sources on Schelling follows, which may be helpful to the reader; all works mentioned below are recommended and worth investigating further.

First, Robert F. Brown's book *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809-1815*<sup>17</sup>, published in 1977, has made an inestimable contribution to the field of Schelling studies, although it might have been more aptly titled, "The Middle Philosophy of Schelling," given the dominant interpretation of

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<sup>16</sup> Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Robert F. Brown, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Boehme on the Works of 1809-1815* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977).



Schelling's philosophical periods mentioned above. Still, the work clearly demonstrates the deep impact reading Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) had on Schelling. It traces Boehme's theosophy throughout Schelling's middle period works, especially the treatise *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Matters Connected Therewith* (1809) and the drafts of *The Ages of the World* (1811-1815).

It is arguable that Andrew Bowie sparked the English retrieval of Schelling in 1993 with the publication of his book *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction*<sup>18</sup>. In this work, Bowie explores the logical rigour of Schelling's philosophy, arguing that Schelling is not plagued by irrationalism or a lack of logic but that he is in fact a strict logician who insists on the inviolability of the law of non-contradiction. Bowie also explores certain parallelisms between Schelling and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Analytic Philosophy.

Since 1993, several other books have bolstered English studies of Schelling, two of which were published in 1996: Dale E. Snow's *Schelling and the End of Idealism*<sup>19</sup> and Slavoj Žižek's *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters*<sup>20</sup>. Snow's book attempts to cover the whole of Schelling's philosophy, ranging from the early Fichtian writings to the later Philosophy of Mythology. Given the extensive range of her subject matter, Snow's exploration is not as specific as the other studies featured here; however, Snow is an attentive reader and interpreter and is aware of Schelling's historical context and of what is at stake in each period of his thought. In this respect, Snow's book is a great achievement and an excellent introduction to Schelling. Taking a different

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<sup>18</sup> Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*.

<sup>19</sup> Dale E. Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (New York: Verso, 1996).

approach, Slavoj Žižek reads Schelling psychologically drawing mostly from Schelling's middle period. Žižek interprets Schelling's philosophy as a proto-form of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. Because Žižek focuses primarily on the development of the [human] subject, he reduces Schelling's narrative of divine drives and potencies to the level of the subjective. Effectively, he dismisses the theological content of Schelling's thinking as merely an analogy for the emergence of selfhood. As such, Žižek's reading is controversial but also original and provocative.

In 2011, Bruce Matthews' book *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy: Life as the Schema of Freedom*<sup>21</sup> was published. This book succeeds in showing the extent to which Schelling was influenced by Plato, 18<sup>th</sup> Century German Speculative Pietism, in particular Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). The book primarily explores how Schelling exploited Plato's metaphysics, as presented in the *Timaeus* and *Philebus*, as part of his reorientation of Kant's epistemology and *critical philosophy* overall. Matthews argues that Schelling's goal was to discover the *Urform* (Primordial Form) of philosophy and thereby to set out the principles that determine both Nature and Spirit. By extension, Matthews looks at the legacy of Pietism in Schelling's thought, especially the notion that Nature is the divine made external; Nature is a kind of divine body. A more than passing familiarity with Plato and Kant is necessary in order to grasp the full extent of Matthews' argument.

Finally, S. J. McGrath also offers a psychological reading of Schelling in his book *The Dark Ground of Spirit: Schelling and the Unconscious*<sup>22</sup>, published in 2012.

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<sup>21</sup> Matthews, *Schelling's Organic Form*.

<sup>22</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*.

Committed to the complementary ends of reading Schelling on his own terms while taking him into new and unexplored territory, McGrath traces the concept of the unconscious, as well as forms of depth psychology, to Schelling's philosophy. He then argues that Schelling's notion of the unconscious extends beyond the confines of the subject; it is that which undergirds and connects opposed elements of reality, such as the objective and the subjective, Nature and Spirit, matter and mind. The unconscious is, therefore, not merely the source of subjective desire and identity but is situated outside of consciousness; it is a sign of transcendence and of the creative power present throughout the manifest world. Following this line of thinking, McGrath sees aspects of Carl Jung's Analytic Psychology as continuous with Schelling's [dissociative] psychology.

Returning to the central topic, there are two distinct ontologico-epistemological narratives within Schelling's early philosophy, circa 1799 to 1801. The first is *Naturephilosophy*, constructed from the standpoint of Nature, and is characterized as the natural history of consciousness. The second is transcendental idealism, developed from the perspective of the self, and is formulated as the stages the self passes through *en route* to self-consciousness. To fuse them as a single narrative would be to lose what is original to Schelling, i.e. the binocular perspective of the Absolute. Despite the fact that these philosophical narratives must remain independent of one another, Schelling states that they must also be placed together, alongside one another as opposite poles<sup>23</sup>. Two questions thus emerge: First, what do *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism consist of in themselves, i.e. in isolation of one another? Second, how should we

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<sup>23</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "F.W.J. Schelling: Presentation of My System of Philosophy (1801)," trans. Michael G. Vater, *The Philosophical Forum* 32 (4) (2001): 344-45.

understand the polar, even *magnetic*, relation of the two philosophies? The first question is answered in chapters I and II, which present expositions of *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism, respectively. As such, the two chapters are works of historical and philosophical understanding and serve as the basis for addressing the second question in the Conclusion.

In answer to the question, “Why focus on the early Schelling?” my response is because this is when Schelling was already making novel contributions to the history of philosophy, in particular his emphasis on the philosophy of nature. More specifically, the early Schelling demands a focused reading precisely because of the ever-present tension that exists between *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism. In effect, Schelling affirms both autonomous, free Nature and the freedom of a synthesizing subject and then proceeds to construct philosophies in which each one is either the subject or the object. In order to accomplish these constructions, Schelling embraced a logic comprised of polarized opposites which are always inextricably connected with one another<sup>24</sup>. Schelling extends this dualistic thinking leading him to affirm seemingly opposed approaches to philosophy, not merely in terms of Nature and transcendental philosophies but also the later negative and positive philosophies. In a sense then, the very *form* of Schelling’s [early] philosophy, i.e. the fact that there are two philosophies, recapitulates the *content* of his philosophy, i.e. the fact that there are always two elements at play with one another, e.g. Nature and Spirit, object and subject, the real and the ideal. Thus, my

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<sup>24</sup> McGrath refers to Schelling’s logic as a kind of “aporia” with reference to a Platonic influence: “Socratic *aporia* forces the interlocutors to move from the ideal to the real, from the merely theoretical consideration of possibilities, of essence, to the judgment which is an act of the person, risking himself on whatever he *believes* to be the truth of the matter [...]” S.J. McGrath, “The question concerning metaphysics: a Schellingian intervention in analytical psychology,” *International Journal of Jungian Studies* (2013): 21, accessed August 1, 2013, doi: 10.1080/19409052.2013.795183.

original notion of *inverted identities*, to be presented and discussed in the Conclusion, may provide deeper insights into the whole of Schelling's philosophical corpus. For the time being these insights will have to wait as the early philosophy is the focus of this thesis. There is much scholarly work still to be done on Schelling, especially in English; it is my hope that this thesis represents a first step in contributing to the future of Schelling studies.

## 2. Chapter I

### Schelling's *Naturephilosophy*: On the Transmutation of Nature

Our ancestors admired the economy of nature. She was thought to have a practical character, inclined to do much with small means where others produce little with great means. As mere mortals, we stand even more in admiration of the skill with which she is able to produce the widest variety of things while restricted to only a few basic principles... Whatever appears in the world must divide if it is to appear at all. What has been divided seeks itself again, can return to itself and reunite. This happens in a lower sense when it merely intermingles with its opposite, combines with it; here the phenomenon is nullified or at least neutralized. However, the union may occur in a higher sense if what has been divided is first intensified; then in the union of the intensified halves it will produce a third thing, something new, higher, unexpected<sup>25</sup>.  
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Polarity”

Nature admittedly makes no leap; but it seems to me that this principle is much misunderstood if we try to bring it into a single class of things which Nature has not only separated, but has herself opposed to one another. That principle says no more than this, that nothing which comes to be in Nature comes to be by a leap; all becoming occurs in a continuous sequence. But it by no means follows from this that everything which exists is for that reason continuously connected—that there should also be no leap between what *exists*. From everything that is, therefore, nothing has *become* without steady progression, a steady transition from one state to another<sup>26</sup>.  
—F.W.J. Schelling (1797)

In Schelling's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), he writes of the transition of the infinite to the finite in the following passage: “The chief problem of the philosophy of nature is not to explain the *active* in Nature (for because it is its first supposition, this is quite conceivable to it), but the *resting, permanent*. Nature philosophy arrives at this explanation simply by virtue of the presupposition that for Nature the permanent is a limitation of its own activity<sup>27</sup>.” Here, Schelling identifies this chapter's fundamental concern: the nature and relation of Nature's primordial productivity to its

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<sup>25</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Polarity,” in *Scientific Studies*, ed. and trans. Douglas Miller (New York, NY: Suhrkamp Publishers, 1988), 155-56.

<sup>26</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as Introduction to the Study of This Science*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 133-34.

<sup>27</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 17.

product. At a particular level of Nature's potency and through a series of dynamic stages, life and mind are produced. Each stage represents a necessary ingredient to the recipe of organic life. The process can be broken down into the following set of seven stages, all of which occur and recur simultaneously: 1) Diremption: the division of Nature's potencies from an original state of indifference; 2) Interaction: at least two potencies engage one another, stirring activity and conditioning the possibility of the composition of organic matter; 3) Inhibition: the organic product is produced through the interaction of universal Nature's activity and a counterforce of inhibition, which restricts and slows the originally uninhibited activity of universal Nature; 4) Appearance: in which the potencies' interaction produces an eddy-like appearance, composed of primordial matter; 5) Solicitation: the organic product remains solicitous of Nature's activity, continuously drawing on its seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of potency; 6) Incorporation: the forces of Nature become the organic product itself; and finally, 7) Regulation: an inward and architectonic principle governs the organism's material form and order which constitute it *qua* organic life; in other words, it continuously reproduces itself as a product *in* Nature. This "seven stages" interpretation is my original reading of Schelling's *Naturephilosophy* and thus represents a novel contribution to the field of Schelling studies; moreover, it is worth noting that the division of production into a set of seven stages applies equally well to Spirit. Throughout Nature's productive process, its forces are transformed from pure [raw] uninhibited activity into the matter, form and order of *organism*. The stages are not sequent, but interdependent and simultaneous. The goal of this chapter is to outline how Schelling accounts for the possibility of the organic product from the postulate of Nature's infinite productivity.

## 2.1 The Postulate and First Condition: The Unconditionedness of Nature

Schelling's *Naturephilosophy* aims to reinvigorate philosophy's conceptualization of Nature by overwriting the idea that Nature is static and determined and affirm in its place Nature as activity or *productivity*<sup>28</sup>. Frederick Beiser describes the fundamental program of Schelling's *Naturephilosophy* as an attempt "to explain life and the mind on a naturalistic yet nonmechanistic foundation<sup>29</sup>." Part of Schelling's project is to show how Nature is responsible for the emergence of phenomena, arguing that this process is not the by-product of subjectivity's inherent drive to construct coherence and experience from what is actually a formless mass of chaotic activity. We should note, however, that from one perspective Schelling is trying to have his cake and eat it too; there is a paradox at work in Schelling's philosophy. The paradox is that there is both autonomous Nature and a synthesizing subject. Schelling conceives of Nature as free and independent of subjectivity; at the same time, he affirms the need for transcendental philosophy and its basis in subjective synthesis. Schelling emphasizes that from the standpoint of Nature, real and actual products are produced; they are not *mere* appearances or phantasms of the mind. Schelling advances this philosophical position by ascribing "unconditionedness" to Nature, i.e. by regarding Nature as *originally absolutely active*<sup>30</sup>. The state of unconditionedness is thus to be grasped as the postulate of *Naturephilosophy*; it represents the starting point from which to think Nature as infinite activity. Whereas universal Nature is unconditioned, organic nature is conditioned. In light of this

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 508.

<sup>30</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 15.



distinction, the aim of *Naturephilosophy* can be formulated in the following way: *to understand the place of the conditioned product (organic nature) within the horizon of unconditioned productivity (universal Nature)*.

The postulate of unconditionedness accomplishes two ends. First, it allows Schelling to conceive of Nature as a dynamic reality in contrast to the Enlightenment's conception of Nature as static and mechanical. Second, the unconditionedness of Nature grounds the possibility of an original diremption necessary to explain the manifest world's generation from an originary source of pure potentiality. On this basis, Schelling is able to conceive of Nature as dynamic, creative and purposive. Among the Germans, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was one of the first to develop a dynamic theory of Nature, as is suggested first by the third analogy of experience in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), and then outlined to a greater extent in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790). In the latter, Kant's idea of Nature is based on the reciprocal-dynamic causality necessary to the formation of biological organisms, rather than limited to a mechanical description. Timothy Lenoir points out that Kant's revised conception of Nature, found in his *Third Critique*, is based in part on recognizing the "special character of organic phenomena"<sup>31</sup>. Following Johann Blumenbach (1752-1840) to some extent, Kant seeks to unify the mechanical with the teleological in order to construct a more complete and, therefore, a more scientific account of Nature. The gap between the mechanical and the teleological is due to the inherent linearity of mechanical explanations; they describe causality exclusively according to linear series of causes and effects: A leads to B leads to C and so

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy Lenoir, *The Strategy of Life: Teleology and Mechanics in Nineteenth Century German Biology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 24.

on. There is no reflexivity to a mechanical theory, nor is there the possibility that B or C might in fact also be the cause of A, which is possible according to a teleological series<sup>32</sup>. The argument, as Lenoir points out, is that A cannot exist without C, just as C cannot exist without A; they are reciprocally dependent. In this respect, A is both the cause and the effect of C<sup>33</sup>. Moreover, teleology posits the notion of a *final cause*—an end to which the organism is directed by virtue of its original nature or essence. For example, a flower cannot help but be a flower. The manifestation of its form is not pre-determined; there is always the possibility of spontaneous rupture or change, meaning that the growth and the bloom of the flower are not guaranteed. But the *form* of the flower is in some sense already determined; its manifestation occurs or does not occur within the limits of that form.

Schelling works within this tradition that seeks to unify mechanism and teleology, although his sense of natural teleology is different from Kant's. Kant believed that teleological explanations of Nature were merely *regulative*, i.e. merely subjective guidelines or principles through which the human being understands the formation and life of physical and biological Nature; thus the dynamism of Kant's philosophy of Nature is not reflective of Nature in itself but is imposed upon it by mind—*laying a sheet of order* (the determinate) *over a bed of chaos* (the indeterminate)<sup>34</sup>. Thus, according to

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> As readers and interpreters of Schelling's philosophy, we must remember that Schelling does not deny subjective synthesis; rather he presents it as an effect of Nature's autonomy and productivity. Kant's transcendental subject is present in Schelling's *Naturphilosophy*; it is generated *out of Nature*. As such, the subject is a product of Nature at the same time that it is a necessary condition for knowledge of Nature; more precisely, the subject is the necessary condition for Nature to know itself: *the self is Nature knowing itself as such*.

Kant, the faculty of understanding is the “lawgiver of nature<sup>35</sup>.” In contrast, Schelling treats teleological laws as *constitutive*, i.e. the dynamism of Nature is constructed by mind out of its interaction with an actually dynamic and systematic realm unto itself. Thus the frameworks and ideas attributed to Nature are signs of an objective reality not necessarily dependent on human subjectivity and the order of mind; Nature, in a sense, has its own purpose and intentionality. Lenoir points out that there are five key features of Romantic biological theories: 1) polarity; 2) unity; 3) metamorphosis; 4) ideal types; and 5) structure of the system of Nature<sup>36</sup>. As we will see in the course of this chapter, all five of these features appear to some degree in Schelling’s *Naturephilosophy*. Mechanism does not assume such notions as unity, purpose and end; these are teleological concepts. Yet in observing Nature the human being is struck by the sense that each of these qualities is part of the truth of Nature. Frederick Coplestone writes that Nature’s identity is revealed through its teleological pattern, “not through its reduction to human ideas<sup>37</sup>.” In order to uncover Nature’s identity, so to speak, Schelling employs teleology as a necessary part of his philosophical approach.

Nature’s externalization—from productivity to product—is presented as a process beginning from the unconditioned manifesting as the conditioned. It is a story of the genesis of phenomena, *or* the transition of the infinite to the finite. In his 1803 introduction to the second edition of his treatise, *Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature as an*

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<sup>35</sup> Kant as quoted by Lenoir, *Strategy*, 27.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Coplestone, *A History of Philosophy, Vol. VII: Modern Philosophy, from the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche* (New York: Image Books, 1994), 113.

*Introduction to the Study of this Science* (1797), Schelling distills the reason why all philosophy must be grounded in Nature:

Man was not born to waste his spiritual force battling against the phantasms of an imagined world, but rather to exercise all his forces over against a world that has influence on him, that lets him feel its power, and upon which he can reciprocally act. Thus no gulf may be fixed between him and the world; contact and interaction must be possible between them, for only then will man become human<sup>38</sup>.

Schelling affirms a fundamental division in the human being, between her organic nature and spirituality. The latter emerges from the former and, teleologically speaking, is destined to realize a particular goal through organic materiality. To this end, Schelling posits an objective environment which presents actual points of resistance, all of which seem to offer potential aid to the human being in her spiritual odyssey. As we will see later on, the gulf between the world and human being is necessary; without it the human being would lack the means through which to articulate her inner spiritual purpose (*telos*). If Nature were merely a static realm, an unchanging reality, it could not provide the necessary conditions for spiritual growth and transformation (ethics). In order to realize this potential, Nature itself must be conceived of as a grand and overarching subject characterized by dynamism and freedom. This is the basis for regarding Nature, and the whole *cosmos*, as a *World Soul*, i.e. as a self-organizing whole defined by the unity of *necessity* and *contingency*<sup>39</sup>. Schelling imagines Nature to be capable of freedom, always *in the process* of unfolding and becoming; moreover, he presents a systematic account of Nature's capacity for spontaneous productivity through which self-consciousness and Spirit are ultimately made manifest.

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<sup>38</sup> Schelling, "Introduction to Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature," 169.

<sup>39</sup> Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 35.

As noted above, a key distinction of *Naturephilosophy* is that of universal Nature, or its productive character, and Nature's individual organic products. The product arises from the productivity of Nature. It is the result of a complex process in which natural potencies are continually solicited. As we will see later in the chapter, these potencies form and constitute the product *as such*. In both his *On the World Soul* (1798) and *First Outline* (1799), Schelling identifies the beginning of production as the diremption of the Absolute<sup>40</sup>. In 1799, Schelling writes, "The beginning of life is activity; it is a tearing loose from universal Nature<sup>41</sup>." The first stage in the production of the organic begins when a measure of autonomy is introduced into Nature. At this moment, Nature splits into *two*, asserting a part of *itself* as free and individual<sup>42</sup>. To accomplish this, a potency in Nature turns away from its source, although without completely separating from it. The production of organic life thus ensues; it is the intensification of Nature and a movement from its original state of indifference and potentiality to a manifest state of difference and actuality<sup>43</sup>. The advent of difference is the advent of *life*; Nature, in a sense, becomes concerned with itself in and through *the form of organic life*<sup>44</sup>. Organic nature signifies particularity relative to Nature's universal productivity<sup>45</sup>. Schelling asserts that universal Nature is in "free, constant growth<sup>46</sup>" and "an infinite process of formation<sup>47</sup>"; in effect,

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<sup>40</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, "On the World Soul (1798)," trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, *Collapse* 6 (2010): 316; Schelling, *First Outline*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 65.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. And, repeated, "Life, where it comes into existence, comes against the will of external nature, as it were, by a tearing-away from it." Ibid., 62.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 5, 68.

<sup>44</sup> "[...] the individual only exists through the pressure of an external nature." Ibid., 69.

<sup>45</sup> Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 174.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas F. O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 23.

<sup>47</sup> "The process of formation is nothing other than a configuring." Schelling, *First Outline*, 35.

every species and individual is a particularization of unconditioned, universal Nature<sup>48</sup>. We might say that the particular is the configuring of the universal; but, as such, it is a failed attempt to concretize the universal. The effect of this failure is that manifestations recur endlessly, still attempting to express the universal; this point will be analyzed in greater detail later in this chapter. After the initial diremption of Nature into separate and independent forces, and the ensuing interaction of these forces, the activity of Nature transforms and becomes a *product* through what Schelling calls “inhibition”: “Nature = a product which passes from figure to figure—in a certain order to be sure, through which, however, it cannot result in determinate products without absolute *inhibition* of the *formation*<sup>49</sup>.” Inhibition is the exertion of counterforce, pressure and resistance to the flow of Nature’s originally infinite activity<sup>50</sup>. The quelling of activity against its natural current produces a distinct point (the product) around and toward which Nature’s potencies flow and accumulate (representing both a qualitative and quantitative change to Nature). The emergence of this point produces a relative stability and fixity of powers<sup>51</sup>; in fact, the powers are constantly moving through the point (the product), reproducing it spatially and temporally. Inhibition of productivity remains constant, if not permanent<sup>52</sup>.

Schelling attempts to work out how the product is possible given that it must inhibit the activity of Nature but also allow it. These simultaneous functions are necessary in order for the product to continue to draw from Nature—the source of potency. The

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>50</sup> David Farrell Krell, “Three Ends of the Absolute: Schelling on Inhibition, Hölderlin on Separation, and Novalis on Density,” *Research in Phenomenology* 32 (1) (2002): 63.

<sup>51</sup> Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 40.

<sup>52</sup> Universal Nature is formative drive. It is “blind” so long as it is uninhibited, lacking reason or purpose (*telos*). In this sense, universal Nature is unproductive as it is incapable of producing something. Only where there is a degree of inhibition of the forces of Nature is Nature properly productive.

product is in constant mediation of the activity of Nature; or, perhaps more accurately, the product *itself* is the constant mediation (“becoming-inhibited”<sup>53</sup>) of Nature’s activity<sup>54</sup>. This process is defined by the tension between composable and decomposable states. Products lie in the middle between the absolutely decomposable and the absolutely indecomposable<sup>55</sup>. The balancing act between decomposability and indecomposability suggests polarity and a median between the two extremes, necessary in order for the conditions of *producthood* to remain possible. The inclination toward one extreme or the other would negate the necessary conditions of relative stability needed for a product to exist. It is worth noting that the product emerges according to a certain restriction of form depending on its species; the individual product does not freely choose its form<sup>56</sup>. This does not mean, however, that there is no variation within a given species. In fact, because of the infinite degrees of proportion of natural potencies, every species contains, if only potentially, an infinite number of individuals. The balance between organic potencies determines the multiplicity and variety within a particular species. Schelling’s theory attempts, therefore, to account for the basic form or archetype of a species, as conceived by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s (1749-1832) archetypal theory, but also the myriad variations, exceptions and possible deformities of the primal form (*Urbild*) within that same species. In this respect, the theory explains what may be identified as *the unity of heterogeneous Nature*, or how Nature is to be understood as both identity and difference.

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<sup>53</sup> “The product, however, is nothing other than productive Nature itself determined in a certain way; the inhibition of the product is, therefore, simultaneously an inhibition of Nature itself; but Nature itself is solely active. Therefore, it cannot be inhibited, unless this becoming-inhibited is itself, from another perspective, again = to activity.” Schelling, *First Outline*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

## 2.2 The Second Condition: The Law of Polarity

Inhibition limits Nature's primordial activity, causing the finite product to manifest<sup>57</sup>.

Without these limits, nothing would be produced, as Schelling observes in the following passages:

If the originally positive were infinite, it would lie entirely beyond the limits of all possible perception. Restricted by the oppressing force, it becomes a finite magnitude—it begins to be an object of perception, or manifests itself in phenomena<sup>58</sup>.

'The product is inhibited at a determinate stage of development' does not mean that it absolutely stops being active, but that it is limited with respect to its productions; it cannot reproduce anything to infinity except itself. Since it is now perpetually active it will be active only for itself, i.e., it will reproduce itself not only as individual but simultaneously as genus to infinity<sup>59</sup>.

Inhibition is not the absolute cessation of activity; rather, it is, as Schelling affirms, a counterforce to infinite activity, necessary to the formation and configuration of what would otherwise remain merely potential<sup>60</sup>. The product is, in a manner of speaking, a nodal point, i.e. a point of convergence in which Nature's basic *potencies* intermix.

Without such interaction, the product would cease to exist; the product is, therefore, dependent on Nature. Thus, in one respect, the relation between Nature and the product is heteronomous; universal Nature holds ultimate sway. However, in another respect, the organic product is not entirely subservient to Nature; it possesses autonomy. The product is a transmuted version or realization of Nature's potential for productivity, i.e. Nature's capacity to produce something from what is initially only pure activity (*pure potentiality*).

Some measure of autonomy is necessary in order for the product to individualize

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<sup>57</sup> Krell, "Three Ends," 65.

<sup>58</sup> Schelling, "On the World Soul," 96.

<sup>59</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 46.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.



itself within Nature. Simultaneously, the organic product's limited or relative autonomy necessarily entails subordination to Nature's activity, as it is only from out of Nature's activity that an organic product can reproduce itself. Schelling describes the simultaneity of heteronomy and autonomy as follows: "Nature achieves its aim in precisely the opposite way than the way in which it attempted to achieve it; the activity of life is the cause of its own dissolution. It is extinguished as soon as it begins to become independent of external nature, i.e., unreceptive to external stimulus, and so life itself is only the bridge to death<sup>61</sup>." In this passage, Schelling articulates that the source of stimulus, life and vitality ultimately also produces exhaustion and death. The original expansion of Nature (*natura naturans*) that generated the individual (*natura naturata*) inevitably contracts to Nature's infinite activity. Moreover, the passage implies that because Nature achieves its intended aim through opposite means "in which it attempted to achieve it," part of Nature's activity must therefore remain outside Nature's own purview, so to speak. In a sense, Nature achieves its end *by accident* through the individual. But this begs the question of whether the accidental nature of Nature's completion is necessary or contingent. I would argue that it is a necessary contingency, as it is dependent on the activity of the individual seeking itself (autonomy, *self-assertion*) at its own expense. There must be an individual [organism, being] that continually fails to grasp itself; this individual is a vehicle of the underlying *telos* of the whole of Nature. In an interesting way, the appearance of the individual *as such* signifies the invisible activity of Nature; after all, the individual *is* Nature's activity, albeit transmuted<sup>62</sup>. So, the activity of the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 67, 69.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 34.

individual is not *essentially* different from the activity of Nature; the only major difference is that the individual is a finite expression of what would otherwise be the infinite activity of Nature. Thus, perhaps the individual product could be interpreted as an expression of Nature's invisibility, as well as the fact that it is unconscious productivity<sup>63</sup>.

The argument for the above point would be that despite the fact that the individual *severs* itself from Nature and takes on an activity of its own it remains a particular expression of Nature. The individual exercises a degree of freedom in its expression of the essence of Nature; by manifesting, the individual becomes a kind of imprint, symbol or sign of Nature's deepest form and essence—the individual is the freedom of Nature manifested in a particular way. But as such the individual is forever grounded in and dependent on Nature itself; the individual is not *really* something unto itself, but a varied and unique projection of Nature's vast reservoir of potency. In this respect, the individual is a sign of its primordial ground—the *World Soul*. Organically speaking, once the individual is born, it is already on its way to death. This is why Schelling writes that “life itself is only the bridge to death<sup>64</sup>.” Organic life must remain in solicitation of Nature (of the forces of Nature), if it is to subsist; even then, its subsistence is temporary. The identity between life and death is a fine line: insusceptibility to the influence of Nature, a drive to exist independently of external Nature, compels life to assert itself against it; in

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<sup>63</sup> It must be noted that Schelling does not speak of *natura naturata* as expressions of an unconscious; however, anticipating Schelling's introduction of the concept of the unconscious in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* later in the same year (written in late 1799, published in 1800), the interpretation offered here may not be far off. The concept seems even more applicable when we consider that Nature's manifestation, from *naturans* to *naturata*, could rightly be understood as a process of the invisible becoming visible, invisible Nature—*Spirit*—becoming visible Nature. Thus, we might say that Schelling's early philosophy, at least as it is expressed in the *First Outline*, is concerned with articulating a law of identity: the invisible *is* the visible.

<sup>64</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 69.

effect, to resist death. As the failed effort at concretization, the individual is abandoned by Nature (*natura naturans*) and so sexualizes and dies<sup>65</sup>. This point will be discussed later in this chapter.

Although organic life is a transmutation of the pure activity of Nature, its identity is not absolutely the same<sup>66</sup>. Whereas the latter is defined by unlimited form (formlessness) and uninhibited activity, the former is necessarily limited in form and inhibited in activity. Limitation and inhibition require that the organism remain open and connected to Nature's seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of potency. Such openness leaves life susceptible to Nature's sheer indifference to form, order and organization. This dual concern to be both open (receptive, expansive) and closed (resistant, contractive) to Nature is reflected in life's own unique activity, which Schelling defines in the following way: "The essence of every organism consists in the fact that it is not absolute activity but an activity mediated by receptivity; for the existence of the organism is not a being, but a perpetual being-reproduced<sup>67</sup>." This state of perpetual reproduction is possible only because the individual is determined by the inner principle of *excitability*—the synthesis of receptivity and activity. The organism is constituted by an inherent capacity to process and respond to external stimuli<sup>68</sup>. The interaction between organism and external influences is continuous and defined by the reciprocal exertion of pressure and force, i.e. polarity, or the contraction and expansion of natural forces. Receptivity defines the

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>66</sup> Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 175.

<sup>67</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 160.

<sup>68</sup> "[...] living matter has a basic capacity to perceive environmental impressions and to respond to them. In other words, the response of organisms to the environment is mediated by an intrinsic activity of the organism." Nelly Tsouyopoulos, "The Influence of John Brown's Ideas in Germany," *Medical History* 8 (1988): 71.

contractive force whereby the organism is impressed upon and processes external influence.

The synthesis of receptivity and activity is “excitability,” a term Schelling borrows from the German physician Andreas Röschlaub (1768-1835)<sup>69</sup>. Röschlaub developed a speculative theory of medicine, *Erregbarkeitstheorie* (excitability theory), in part based on the “Brunonian System of Medicine” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish physician John Brown (1735-1788)<sup>70</sup>. Excitability theory posits that a union of contrary natural forces is necessary to produce and thereafter to *reproduce* the organism<sup>71</sup>. In essence, it presents an ontogenetic theory of organic life grounded in the interplay of Nature’s constitutive potencies. The concept of excitability is, therefore, an organism’s *inner* architectonic principle which structures and regulates the organism’s constitution *as such*. The principle signifies the organism’s capacity to regulate the flow of Nature’s forces and thereby coordinate its organic development. Potencies are processed according to the organism’s autarchic drive to reproduce itself from the influx of natural potencies<sup>72</sup>. In constructing itself, the organism becomes like a lightning rod within the system of Nature.

The nature of the product appears fixed and permanent, but it is actually highly dynamic and ever-changing. The dialectic of permanence and change is a defining quality of organic phenomena. Dalia Nassar writes that the “capacity for self-development and reproduction, the drive toward infinite development, is, according to Schelling, nothing

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>70</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 160.

<sup>71</sup> “The external force would not produce the phenomenon of life by itself unless a capacity to be determined to certain functions existed in the organism.” Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> “That the organism is excitable (or reproduces itself) in conflict with external pressure means that the organism is its own object.” Ibid.

other than metamorphosis<sup>73</sup>.” Moreover, for Schelling, metamorphosis is an “interior relation of the forms that is unthinkable without an archetype, which underlies everything<sup>74</sup>.” As such, metamorphosis is “an inner construction” of Nature; Nature, from bottom to top, is conditioned by a set of archetypes that precede and constitute the parts within a set of formal organic limits<sup>75</sup>. These limits, however, are not absolute but merely relative; furthermore, change and deviation from these limits is not impossible but is an inevitable consequence of manifestation and materiality. Nature, consistent with its autopoietic, autarchic and autonomous character, provides itself simultaneously with its own archetype, which “passes immediately into the product and cannot be separated from it<sup>76</sup>.” Schelling affirms a similar architectonic principle of Spirit when, in 1803, he affirms G.W. Leibniz’s (1646-1716) notion that “all changes, all alterations of perceptions and representations within a spirit could proceed only from an inner principle<sup>77</sup>.” The idea is that change and alteration are balanced by an organism’s ontogenetic tendency toward cohesion and unity. Change and difference are only possible so long as there is *also* unity and identity. This is especially evident in the human being, in whom the concept of subject or self signifies a relative unity, if not a permanent one.

The whole process of organic construction is driven by the law of polarity—Nature’s potencies turning outward and inward, oscillating between expansion and contraction, externalization and internalization. In his short piece, *Polarity*, Goethe describes how Nature generates worldly phenomena by first dividing into a set of jostling

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<sup>73</sup> Nassar, “Philosophy of Self,” 316.

<sup>74</sup> Schelling as quoted in Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>77</sup> Schelling, “Introduction to Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature,” 174.

independent forces. This division signifies the diremption of original unconditioned Nature. These conditioned forces of Nature can either return into themselves, thereby closing off any possibility of difference and interaction, or, they can be *intensified* through their opposite force which produces, what Goethe calls, “something new, higher<sup>78</sup>.” In Nature, organic life and phenomena become *something higher* than the mere forces which produce them, as life and phenomena are the products of intensified syntheses of the forces themselves<sup>79</sup>. Dynamic and teleological conceptions of Nature were part of the scientific discourse of the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, as exemplified by both Kant and Goethe. However, it is worth considering that Schelling’s profound concern for Nature may not derive solely from reading either of these thinkers. Rather, Schelling’s concern for Nature may have grown from earlier influences acquired by his birth and baptism in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century Pietism of Württemberg. As S. J. McGrath points out, Schelling was exposed to the speculative Pietism of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782) during his childhood and youth<sup>80</sup>. Evidence for this is that for a time Schelling lived with an uncle in Nürtingen while attending Latin school; this uncle was described as a “fiery disciple of Oetinger’s<sup>81</sup>.” Furthermore, still in Nürtingen, Schelling encountered Phillip Matheus Hahn (1739-1790), another disciple of Oetinger. McGrath notes that Hahn left so great an impression on Schelling that as a boy Schelling “was inspired to compose his first poem on the occasion of the great theologian’s death<sup>82</sup>.” These

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<sup>78</sup> Goethe, *Polarity*, 156.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*, 44.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

biographical connections provide clear evidence that Schelling was exposed to Oetinger's theology.

Oetinger theorized that Nature is the manifestation of the divine. To this end, he rejects "mechanism" on the basis that it produces an atomistic view of life and world, which, in turn, reduces the Absolute to the "interaction of discrete particles"<sup>83</sup>. In place of mechanism, Oetinger conceived of the Absolute as "self-revealing life"<sup>84</sup>. The revelation of the divine in Nature is made possible by the interplay of various polarities in Nature. As we have seen thus far, this notion of Nature is compatible with Schelling's idea that Nature's true and most basic purpose is *self-manifestation*. Nature's manifestation in *naturata* is driven by inner *a priori* ends (*telos*) which are achieved with variation *a posteriori*. The law of polarity identifies the catalyst of this underlying process of individuation. Individuation is defined by contradiction and conflict; without opposition, the formation and sustenance of phenomena is not possible. Yet Schelling's notion of opposition in Nature is grounded in the idea of a "common origin"; Schelling writes in *On the World Soul* (1798), "real antithesis is possible only between things of one kind and common origin"<sup>85</sup>. Despite the fact of multiple forces, there is only *one* original source of all things finite.

Following Kant's terminology in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), Schelling qualifies polarity as *the law of reciprocal determination*<sup>86</sup>. In his *On the World Soul* (1798), Schelling states, "The law of polarity is the general law of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Schelling, "On the World Soul," 17.

<sup>86</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 65.

the world<sup>87</sup>.” One of *Naturephilosophy*’s essential theses is that Nature is constituted by the interplay of opposing forces, which, according to the proper mixture of potencies, produces organic life. Polarity is therefore a necessary condition of organic production; it signifies the continuous negotiation of forces: *polarity is the engine of all vital phenomena*. Polarity explains how the infinite activity of Nature can produce something—a product—once it is inhibited; only then will Nature divide into contrarily charged forces, conditioning the possibility of phenomenality. The degree of limitation necessary to produce an organic product is possible because of the two primary potencies or “tendencies” in Nature. These *tendencies* recall the notion of a centre-point relative to which one tendency is centripetal, contracting inward toward the centre, while the other is centrifugal, expanding outward to infinity<sup>88</sup>. The interaction of these tendencies constitutes the condition of polarity. The purpose (*telos*) of polarity and of phenomenality is to manifest a visible dimension of the Absolute<sup>89</sup>. This idea is based on the originary division of the Absolute into the dual-aspects of Nature and Spirit. We are not ruling out the possibility that Spirit could exist without becoming visible; however, if Spirit is to manifest, Schelling’s system seems to suggest that it can only do so through Nature and phenomena. In the most basic terms then, Nature’s teleological goal (*telos*) is *to self-manifest*, understanding that the ground of Nature and Spirit are the same. Through manifestation, Spirit acquires form, shape and somatic, material being; thus, we may conclude that the condition of the possibility of Spirit’s visibility is polarity.

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<sup>87</sup> O’Meara, *Romantic Idealism*, 53.

<sup>88</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism*, 531. It is worth noting that the terms “centripetal” and “centrifugal” appear in Friedrich Christoph Oetinger’s speculative theology. According to Bruce Matthews, Oetinger transposes the terms from Isaac Newton’s natural philosophy. Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form*, 49.

<sup>89</sup> Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form*, 7.



### 2.3 The Third Condition: The “Actant” or “Potency”

After the unconditionedness of Nature—the postulate and first condition of *Naturephilosophy*— and the law of polarity—the second condition—the third condition is the concept of *actant (Aktion)*<sup>90</sup>. The individual actant is a divided portion of Nature which remains purely productive; its interaction with other actants composes organic products. Basically an actant is a primordial power that develops form and definition through combination and mixture with other actants. Again, the purely productive character of Nature must be posited in order to understand how the product is at all possible; without it, there is simply no basis from which to theorize how anything in Nature is generated. In this respect, the actant is a material condition of phenomenality and organic life. Without it, there is no possibility of *producthood*. Nothing in Nature is simple; each product exists only through the combination of actants (*Aktion*)<sup>91</sup>. In this sense, the actant is the first division and pluralisation of Nature’s primordial activity (*natura naturans*); although not entirely unlike atoms, they are not substances but powers. The actant (*Aktion*) is synonymous with what Schelling elsewhere identifies as *potency (Potenz)*. Although Schelling does not explicitly equate actant with potency, he uses them interchangeably. Schelling uses both terms in his description of organic production (organic individuation):

Since each actant is highly individual, and since each strives to produce what it must produce according to its nature, this will furnish the drama of a struggle in which no force entirely conquers the other nor completely submits to the other. The egotism of each individual actant must join itself to that of all the others; what is produced is a product of the subordination of all under one and one under all, i.e. the most complete *mutual subordination*. No individual potency could

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<sup>90</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 28.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

produce the whole for itself, but all together can produce it. The product does not lie in the individual, but in all together, for it is indeed itself nothing other than the external phenomenon or the visible expression of that constantly operating combination and decomposition of elements<sup>92</sup>.

While first identifying the forces of Nature that produce life as “actants” (*Aktion*), late in the same paragraph Schelling calls them “potencies” (*Potenz*). In this same passage, reminiscent of Goethe’s conception of Nature discussed earlier in this chapter, Schelling outlines how the organic product is composed of multiple potencies. All of organic nature, each species and individual, is the result of complex sets of relations and linkages between potencies. Although Nature is understood as a universal organism in itself<sup>93</sup>, the *World Soul*, it also contains grades and stages of organic particularization and distinction, each of which is only a part of the totality of Nature<sup>94</sup>. A distinct and individual product emerges when “the most complete mutual subordination” occurs. Subordination, in this context, means that individual potency is dependent on other potencies to generate the organic product; in essence, organic nature is dependent on universal Nature. Potency needs others not only to produce life but in order for the potency itself to be transformed into something higher and more intense than it is *in itself*. The independence or *egotism of potency*, as Schelling calls it, must be overcome and opened up to the otherness of separately existing potencies. Without the turn toward others, a turn away from egotism and self-centredness, life would not emerge in Nature. Centres of interacting potencies would not arise and the requisite intensity needed to produce life would remain only within the realm of possibility, dissipating each time potency reverts inward. By turning

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>93</sup> “Individual products have been posited in Nature, but Nature implies a universal organism.—Nature’s struggle against everything individual.” Ibid., 6.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 28.

to otherness, the first potency negates its self-affirming inclination in favour of intensification through the other potency; it gives itself over to cooperation and reciprocity. Thus, the organic product is produced and maintained in a constant interaction of potencies, conditioned by the law of polarity, i.e. *the reciprocal determination of potencies*. To draw a contemporary correlation with Schelling's doctrine of potencies, gene theory parallels to some degree the potency-centred idea of Nature. Like Nature's potencies, genes are the simplest and most basic unit of living organisms according to contemporary biology and genetics<sup>95</sup>. Even so, evidence is mounting that genes are neither constant nor immutable and that their nature may be defined as much by change and dynamism as they are by constancy and fixity<sup>96</sup>.

Schelling articulates four principles on the nature of actants. First, "each organism is itself nothing other than the collective expression for a multiplicity of actants, which mutually limit themselves to a determinate sphere<sup>97</sup>." As already noted, an organism is composed of a number of potencies interacting with one another. This interactivity is the very condition of the possibility of organic matter, and of the dynamism of organic life. The activity of the actants explains the mutability and transitoriness of organic states and of organic life in general. However, it also identifies that the product has a "lawful aspect," which compels it to produce and to reproduce constantly a degree of order and

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<sup>95</sup> Jonathan Hodgkin, "Thin and fat from the start," review of *The Epigenetics Revolution: How modern biology is rewriting our understanding of genetics, disease and inheritance*, by Nessa Carey, *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 4, 2012, No. 5692.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Schelling continues, "This sphere is something perennially enduring—not something merely fading into the background as appearance—for it is that which *originates* in the conflict of actants, the monument, as it were, of those activities prehending one another; it is the *concept of that change itself*, which is the only enduring thing in the change. In all the lawlessness of the actants continuously jostling one another, there yet remains the *lawful aspect of the product itself*, which they (and no others) are constrained among themselves to produce [...]" Schelling, *First Outline*, 51.

form through the conjoining of independent potencies. Despite the obvious chaos and disjointedness caused by the interplay of potencies, Schelling affirms what he calls “the lawful aspect of the product itself<sup>98</sup>.” This is yet another sign of an inner principle, such as “excitability,” which compels the product, if only unconsciously, to regulate and reproduce its constitution *qua* product. This notion suggests a degree of ontogenetic self-legislation, or autonomy, meaning the product maintains itself beyond being *autonomic*: it is also self-producing (*autopoietic*) and self-organizing (*autarchic*)<sup>99</sup>.

Schelling’s second principle affirms the latter point quite explicitly. It states that the conflicts between actants “must be seen as functions of the organism itself<sup>100</sup>.” The organism cannot be reduced to any single potency or combination of potencies; rather, all of the potencies taken together, despite their actions for and against one another, signify the underlying identity of the organism<sup>101</sup>. We must, as Schelling states, interpret the struggles of potencies as having been produced by the organism itself. The organism is not *merely* a by-product of potency-interplay; it is not *merely* an epiphenomenon<sup>102</sup>. The organism is genuinely real and actual, albeit impermanent and subject to change. Andrew Bowie affirms this position as well; of the organic product he writes: “When an organism develops by the interaction of its constituents it becomes more than the sum of its law-bound material parts<sup>103</sup>.” This position is affirmed by Schelling when he writes, in *On the World Soul* (1798), that finite potencies are not phenomena themselves, rather they

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>99</sup> Matthews, *Schelling’s Organic Form*, xiii, 7.

<sup>100</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 37.

<sup>102</sup> Beiser, *German Idealism*, 549.

<sup>103</sup> Andrew Bowie, *German Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 41.

“conceal themselves behind” phenomena<sup>104</sup>. If phenomena conceal the potencies which constitute them, then the phenomena themselves signify something distinct from the potencies, albeit something utterly dependent on the potencies for sustenance.

Differences between organisms are accounted for by a third principle which states that “[A]ll diversity in the organic realm of Nature could proceed from a variation in proportion of these functions in respect of their intensity<sup>105</sup>.” Every species and individual embodies a different degree of potency and intensity of receptivity-activity<sup>106</sup>.

Organically, two human beings generally have the same kind and proportion of potency; this is what conditions *human beingness*. Individually, however, each one is an instantiation of difference, a confluence of potencies incorporated into a particular form and shape. Flesh, bone, cartilage, sensitivity, as well as thunderstorms, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions are all produced by the interaction of organic potencies. Every instance of organic life is an example of potency-exchange and negotiation. This high degree of change could suggest an unstable and precarious economy that never achieves permanent balance, absolute rest and peace; however, Schelling’s fourth and final principle of the actant imagines an inherent tendency *toward equilibrium*. This implies an inner-drive for what may be called “regulation,” i.e. a state in which the potencies attempt to keep one another in cooperation and equilibrium<sup>107</sup>. Surely every moment of life is open to

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<sup>104</sup> Schelling, “On the World Soul,” 96; Jeremy Dunham, Iain Hamilton Grant and Sean Watson, *Idealism: The History of a Philosophy* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 134.

<sup>105</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 51.

<sup>106</sup> *Reciprocal Determination*: “Activity and receptivity arise simultaneously in one and the same indivisible moment, and precisely this simultaneity of activity and receptivity constitutes life.” *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>107</sup> Tsouyopoulos, “Influence of John Brown,” 72. Consider also the following passage from Schelling: “The functions then must stand in inverse relationship of intensity with one another, such that as the one is augmented in intensity the other diminishes, and conversely as the one diminishes in intensity the other has to increase. In short, the functions must be opposed to one another and reciprocally maintain each other in

potency-negotiation, but a bonding and unifying tendency appears to be *at work* in the pool of swirling potencies from which all phenomena originate. The whole process of potency interaction is driven by the inviolable law of polarity—*the law of reciprocal determination*<sup>108</sup>.

#### **2.4 The Equilibrium of Organic Life and the Natural Origin of Consciousness**

As noted above, the goal (*telos*) of Nature's manifestation in organic products is to reveal Spirit. According to Schelling, however, the heterogeneous character of the organic renders the goal (*telos*) of realizing an exact proportion of the Absolute impossible. The Absolute *as such* is by definition the originally indifferent, i.e. the original One. Universal Nature—the unconditional (*Unbedingte*)—thus stands in direct opposition to life, for the latter is composite and divisible, tending toward homogeneity but simultaneously resisting it. Cooperation between potencies and resistance to the overarching force of indifferent Nature are two main characteristics of organic life. The purpose of organic production is to see the individual product develop, take shape and become part of organic nature. Despite its individuality, each life incorporates and reflects the full spectrum and array of organic forces<sup>109</sup>. There is a common bond between organic products, as each one is an admixture of Nature's potencies. Even as the individual product is an embodiment of a universal principle, it protects its particularity against the

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equilibrium, which in itself already corresponds with the concept of an organism." Schelling, *First Outline*, 51-52.

<sup>108</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 65.

<sup>109</sup> "[T]he universal principle of life individualizes itself in every individual living being (as if in a unique world) according to the different degree of its receptivity." Keith R. Peterson, Introduction to *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature (1799)*, by F.W.J. Schelling (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), xxii.

possibility of absolute dissolution<sup>110</sup>. A key passage that expresses this tension is: “Nature contests the Individual: it longs for the Absolute and continually endeavors to represent it. It seeks the most universal proportion in which all actants, without prejudice to their individuality, can be unified. Individual products, therefore, in which Nature’s activity is at a standstill, can only be seen as misbegotten attempts to achieve such a proportion<sup>111</sup>.” This passage appears in the context where Schelling articulates how Nature is able to inhibit its own activity while at the same time remain essentially active. Nature maintains both states through what Schelling calls the “sexual drive<sup>112</sup>,” an *a priori* regulative principle which is meant to account for the possibility and fact of sexual difference throughout Nature. Schelling explores sexuation as the condition for the possibility of further individuation: without first separating into different sexes, the product cannot initiate further development. But sexuation, i.e. limitation according to sex, also compromises the possibility of substantial and formal development.

The separation of the sexes is another layer of division, a kind of recapitulation of the original *diremption* that originated *naturata* from *naturans*. The sexed individual thus becomes a medium for a higher expression of the Absolute to be manifested in the genus; and although the genus too cannot rightfully be identified as a complete manifestation of the Absolute, its general, more universal, and in some sense *abstract*, form makes it closer to Nature’s end (*telos*) than was the individual. Schelling thinks along these lines when he writes, “*The genus must appear as end of Nature, the individual as means—the*

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<sup>110</sup> “Life is nothing other than a productivity that is restrained from passing over into the product. Absolute transition into the product is death. Thus what interrupts productivity sustains life.” David Farrell Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 102.

<sup>111</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 35.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

individual expire and the genus remain—if it is true that individual products in Nature ought to be seen as unsuccessful attempts to represent the Absolute<sup>113</sup>.” This point suggests that Nature may be attributed with a certain degree of intentionality in its manifestations. Despite the fact of individuation—the production of a separate intentionality—Nature still determines that the individual is not its proper end (*telos*), as the foregoing passage makes clear. This is because the individual is a failed attempt to construct an absolute unity of actants. The individual actually represents a *limit* on Nature’s activity and thus is *abandoned* by Nature and treated as only a means to an end—the *genus*<sup>114</sup>. Through individuals Nature produces *genus*, a proportion closer to “the most universal proportion<sup>115</sup>.” In this respect, the sexuation of animal and plant *naturata* is an intentional production by Nature to remain *on course* toward “the most universal proportion.” Sexuation is, therefore, Nature’s strategy to both produce a relative manifestation of itself (the individual: a kind of image or self-limit of Nature) while at the same time remain infinitely active through the genus.

Yet, according to Schelling, the activity of the potencies, which produces *difference* and heterogeneity through inhibition and mutual subordination, nonetheless strives to express *original identity*; this is “the basis for all activity in Nature<sup>116</sup>.” The counteraction toward original identity works against the organic product because it is a drive originating from universal Nature, which “labors to destroy” the individual<sup>117</sup>. Paradoxically the counterweight from universal Nature is not absolutely contrary to

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 41.



life<sup>118</sup>. In fact, the negative drive of the potencies toward *absolute identity* sustains life. Once life emerges, it cannot sustain itself unless it continues to draw from the wellspring of Nature. This process must always be counterbalanced by a positive force; polarity does not emphasize the negative force over the positive, but requires both charges to regulate phenomena. Universal Nature supplies the potencies that condition productivity; simultaneously it seeks to draw the same potencies back into their original state of indifference. By compelling the potencies toward indifference, Nature disrupts organic productivity; it seeks to annihilate individuality. In this respect, Nature is contrary and against life. Conversely, disruption reinforces the need for direct and continuous connection between life (particular) and Nature (universal); any interruption sends a shockwave through life. If it is to survive and flourish, the organism must balance its dependence on Nature. The source of life is also the source of its destruction; life must therefore remain in continual solicitation of Nature's powers. The counteraction between life and Nature, if it is in balance, produces a healthy and well-ordered organic product. Such equilibrium is, in the context of *Naturephilosophy*, the highest state of organic realization; Schelling calls it *the noon of life*: "In the degree that activity rises, receptivity must fall, until both enter into the most complete reciprocal determination, where they maintain equilibrium with one another—which is then the noon of life, as it were<sup>119</sup>." Just as we must emphasize the necessity of both positively and negatively charged forces, conversely we cannot emphasize equilibrium at the expense of disequilibrium. Life is

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<sup>118</sup> "It indeed sounds paradoxical, but is no less true, that through the influences which are contrary to life, life is sustained.—Life is nothing other than a productivity held back from the absolute transition into a product. The absolute transition into product is death. That which interrupts productivity, therefore, sustains life." Ibid., 62.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 65.

truly the product of disequilibrium brought about by the conflict between the original freedom of *natura naturans* and the relative freedom of *natura naturata*.

Schelling offers a notion of Nature's freedom that serves two purposes. From the vantage point of finite Nature, free activity sets out to affirm individual producthood above all else. At the same time, infinite Nature seeks to undo individuality. The picture that emerges is one in which organisms cannot assert themselves over and above the rest of the natural world without producing a startling causality of potential catastrophe and self-destruction. Nature abhors an egoist; and yet Nature also needs the energy of an egoist in order to self-manifest. Without the vehicles of particularity and ego, i.e. of the organism, there is no possibility of Nature's manifestation. Nature's ordering keeps each thing in check and determined according to her inner necessity, not according to the new, albeit derived, freedom of the individual. Organisms are grounded in the way Nature moves—the way she animates her products. In this respect, organisms are very much subject to the *way* of manifestation. We might say that in manifestation Nature turns on itself. This freedom is the basis of disequilibrium, and it allows manifest products (*natura naturata*) to come into opposition with their origin and ground (*natura naturans*). In this sense, Nature's freedom is not merely the possibility of self-determination but the possibility of negating, and turning away from (deviation), the very source of organic life, the very source of being. This sense of freedom, which implies that equilibrium is grounded in disequilibrium, is quite radical in its orientation, allowing for the possibility that matter, materiality and life itself are the source of both their own ongoing activity (self-organization) and their inevitable, even imminent, end. The principle that disequilibrium is the ground of equilibrium also describes the original diremption of the

Absolute into dual-aspects of Nature and Spirit, as well as Nature's transition from infinite activity to finite potency and phenomena. The original diremption of the Absolute could thus be defined as *the original disequilibrium necessary for the possibility of world*.

The acme of life is not a point of rest where the product and Nature reach a state of eternal reciprocity. The conflict between life and Nature repeats and both remain susceptible to the other's influence. Although Nature will ultimately reabsorb its individual products, it is nonetheless affected by the whims and freedom of life. Throughout its solicitation of Nature, life oscillates between activity and receptivity. This "internal" oscillation represents the process through which the organic product channels and directs the solicited powers from Nature.

Life thus has two highest points between which it pulses, as it were, and from the one it passes over immediately into the other. The maximum of activity = the minimum of receptivity, but the minimum of receptivity = also the minimum of activity, that is, the maximum of receptivity, and so it is conceivable how each maximum in organic nature passes immediately into its opposite, the minimum, and the converse<sup>120</sup>.

This dialectical movement between degrees of receptivity and activity describes the underlying activity of organic potencies. It drives home the extent to which polarity conditions every instance of organic life. The polarized nature of the entire schema of potency-interaction leaves the product susceptible to disintegration if the potencies are inclined to move farther away from one another. Schelling identifies this tendency to separation and self-affirmation as a potential danger to the product; the organic state is threatened by the consequences of disequilibrium<sup>121</sup>. This leaves the product vulnerable to

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>121</sup> "The opposing natural activities that are operative in the product toward opposite directions always become more independent from one another; the more independent from one another they become, the

disease, collapse and, ultimately, dissolution. On the brink of breakdown, the constitution of the product either establishes relative balance and union or dissolves the disturbance absolutely. In the latter case, the bond of potencies ceases to cohere and all movement and striving is exhausted; whereupon the potencies revert to a point of absolute indifference.

The bond between potencies is determined by and is the outcome of the law of reciprocal determination:

[...] this is precisely the law of all activity, namely: that an activity which no longer has an object never reverts into itself, and likewise, that there is no longer an object for an activity that has ceased to revert into itself; that in this way the highest moment of activity borders immediately on the dissolution of it. Organic life begins in this way, with the reflection of an activity through an object, just as the higher activity, and the object itself, falls within the point of reflection for the organic as for the higher activity. If this point lies infinitely far away then the activity is no longer reflected, it has no more intensity and dissipates into the infinite. If it lies infinitely near then it has no more extension and disappears into itself<sup>122</sup>.

The bond of potencies is a process and interaction which Schelling likens to chemical combustion<sup>123</sup>. This analogy is intended to convey life's intensification of the potencies. Life itself, then, is a form of combustion. The heat of this process remains constant so long as the supply of fuel is proportional to the consumption; the process is economic in nature, an ontogenetic version of commodity supply and demand. Together the potencies ignite one another and produce something different, higher and more intense than the potencies in isolation. As long as the potencies interact, life will exist intact in varying degrees of composition and equilibrium, depending on the proportions of potencies

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more the equilibrium is disturbed within the determinate sphere of Nature that they describe. If they arrive at the maximum point of mutual independence, then the greatest moment of disturbed equilibrium is also achieved." Ibid., 40.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 67.

relative to one another. This process of *reciprocal determination* passes from maximum to minimum of force; in-between it produces activity and degrees of intensity equal to the product. This is the process through which life is generated and sustained. The point to which the potencies withdraw into themselves and, conversely, from which they expand into infinity suggests, once more, a centre-point (*centrum*). Deviation from this centre-point causes degrees of disequilibrium between potencies<sup>124</sup>. As long as the proportion of potencies is in relative balance or equilibrium, a proper differentiation continues. Thus the individual, organic product differentiates itself from universal Nature. In this way, life is a state of *becoming-inhibited*. It is a nexus, always perilously on the cusp of dissolution: the abyssal return to original indifference.

Yet, Schelling asserts that the organic product can never reach a point of absolute indifference so long as it exists. Absolute indifference would suggest that the forces that produced the product have ceased their activity; at which point the organic product would cease to be organic and would return to an inorganic state: “Death is the return into universal indifference<sup>125</sup>.” At death, the forces and potencies of Nature dissipate and dissolve the product into universal activity, which produces nothing because the centre or nodal point no longer exists to *inhibit* and *solicit* universal activity. Activity overpowers the actor; the universal reclaims the particular. Schelling summarizes this stage of development when he writes:

Only at the moment when it has ceased to be organic does the product resolve itself into the universal indifference. The constituents that were drawn from the universal organism revert into it once again; and since life is nothing other than an intensified condition of common natural forces, as soon as this condition has

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<sup>124</sup> Krell, “Three Ends,” 66.

<sup>125</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 68.

passed, the product falls back into the dominion of these forces. The same forces which have for a time maintained life finally destroy it too, and so life is not anything in itself, it is only the phenomenon of a transition of certain forces from that intensified condition into the usual condition of the universal<sup>126</sup>.

To illustrate his theory of potencies, Schelling likens his conception of the organic product to a whirlpool<sup>127</sup>. The analogy defines Schelling's conception of equilibrium and disequilibrium of universal Nature's productivity *vis-à-vis* the *seemingly-permanent-but-merely-apparent*<sup>128</sup> organic product<sup>129</sup>. The pool is generated through the interaction of opposing forces, which produce the centre-point. While the whirlpool serves as an illustration of Schelling's differentiation between Nature's productivity and the organic product, the magnet is his analogy for the fundamental polarization of forces present throughout the universe<sup>130</sup>. Polarization is the second condition from which germinates the whole *Naturephilosophy*. It assumes that all of Nature can be comprehended according to a *schema* consisting of at least two *forces* or *potencies*. As explored above, independently the forces have no lasting effect. Schelling's philosophy is not a form of vitalism; there is no singular *vital force*<sup>131</sup>. Only polarization causes determinate movement by and between the forces. In need of a beginning point for Nature's development, Schelling posits an original division (diremption) as the basis for things, which stems from the postulate of *Naturephilosophy*—the unconditionedness of Nature. Schelling states, "there is one cause that brought the original antithesis into Nature and

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>130</sup> "The differences are seen as an ascending series of potentials in nature, which entail a polar opposition within themselves. The model is the magnet, whose opposite poles are inseparable from each other."

Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 41.

<sup>131</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 111.

we can designate this cause the (unknown) cause of original magnetism<sup>132</sup>.” Original magnetism implies a state in which two forces are sufficiently charged with the potential to be pulled into proximity and relation with one another. The magnetic relationship is one in which two move (closer) together as if they were in fact one (a single movement). Yet, the magnetic relation does not fuse or sublimate the two forces. A fusion of the two forces would depolarize (de-intensify) the relation which would lead to inertia or, conversely, the overabundance of action and accumulation of power causing dissolution and ultimately death.

At first glance, the magnet recalls Fichte’s early concept of the Transcendental Subject<sup>133</sup>. Just as the magnet includes a negative and a positive force, Fichte’s subject is defined by dual positing of negation (not-I) and affirmation (I). Together, the not-I and the I compose the Transcendental Subject, the higher unity of the two more basic forces, which are caught in a state of striving for and against one another. Schelling affirms a similar identity; like Fichte’s concept of self, Schelling argues that identity is realized through differentiation and synthesis, albeit a synthesis which is unconscious and never complete<sup>134</sup>. The key difference is that for Schelling the process is objective and subjective rather than merely subjective, as it is for Fichte. *Naturephilosophy* represents the objective portion of Schelling’s “system of philosophy.” The objective activity of Nature’s forces jostle about, forming a grand array of phenomena; all the while, they have

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 186; Krell, *Contagion*, 113.

<sup>133</sup> Following Hegel’s interpretation, Fichte’s philosophy cannot be described as *magnetic* because it ultimately posits only one force, one activity—the single activity of the self, i.e. self-positing. [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, 1977), 151]. Two forces are required for a philosophy to be genuinely *magnetic*; Schelling’s [early] philosophy qualifies because it maintains a distinction between two forces, i.e. the expansive and contractive forces of Nature.

<sup>134</sup> Horst Althaus, *Hegel: An Intellectual Biography*, trans. Michael Tarsh (Malden: Polity Press, 2000), 52.

no knowledge of their own activity. Nature only comes to know itself when the forces produce a product adequately composed for such a purpose (*telos*). This purpose acquires material form in the unique product of human being; only then has Nature generated eyes and ears attuned to the spiritual nature of the phenomenal world. In human being Nature acquires a voice sufficient to the task of articulating its inner necessity, the teleology of the Absolute's journey *into the open*, and the secrets of Nature's unconscious productivity.

Somewhat paradoxically, articulating the inner necessity of Nature requires freedom, a force powerful enough to act *against* Nature's autonomy. Thus the autonomy of Nature contains the possibility of a second autonomy, i.e. human freedom, capable of acting against Nature's laws. Human freedom reaches out into the external world from an inner world of consciousness. In this moment of folding over, of the external world reaching beyond the surface of the internal world, and the internal world reaching out touching the living world of phenomena, self-consciousness emerges as a centre-point, a point of origin and of gathering, in the endless horizon of the cosmos. Interestingly, Schelling constructs the subjective portion of his philosophy somewhat independently of the objective portion. He calls the former "transcendental idealism: and makes the "absolute self" or "I" its centre and beginning point. We will trace the emergence of this other autonomy and productivity, that of the self and *Spirit*, in Chapter II.



### 3. Chapter II

## Schelling's *Transcendental Idealism*: On the Odyssey of Spirit

The self is pure act, a pure doing<sup>135</sup>.  
– F.W.J. Schelling (1800)

What we speak of as nature is a poem lying pent in a mysterious and wonderful script.  
Yet the riddle could reveal itself, were we to recognize in it the odyssey of the spirit, which, marvellously deluded, seeks itself, and in seeking flies from itself; for through the world of sense there glimmers, as if through words the meaning, as if through dissolving mists the land of fantasy, of which we are in search<sup>136</sup>.  
– F.W.J. Schelling (1800)

As we have seen thus far in the context of *Naturephilosophy*, Schelling's philosophy is *transcendental*: it seeks to articulate the conditions necessary to "how a nature outside us is possible<sup>137</sup>." Whereas in *Naturephilosophy* the condition of this possibility was Nature itself (*natura naturans*), in the context of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) the condition of theoretical construction is the self and its inner necessary activity of self-positing. From the standpoint of transcendental idealism, Schelling identifies the basis of philosophy as "a hypothesis, that there is indeed *reality* in our knowledge, and we shall ask what the conditions of this reality may be<sup>138</sup>." The task then of transcendental philosophy is to articulate the conditions of the possibility of reality; by limiting his investigation to the conditions of reality, Schelling seeks to understand what makes knowledge [of self and Nature] possible<sup>139</sup>.

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<sup>135</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 27.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>137</sup> Schelling, "Introduction to Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature," 202.

<sup>138</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 15.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

My contention for this chapter is that in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* Schelling attempts a different approach to the question of the exhibition of the infinite in the finite by constructing a philosophy beginning from the standpoint of the subjective which produces the objective from out of its inner capacity for production. The productivity of the self emerges not from Nature but from itself; therefore, it must be considered from its own vantage point and as a separate productivity. This second productivity is the self and its teleological goal is twofold: 1) to actualize (transform) the potentiality of the Absolute by opening a new region of being into which the Absolute may expand; and 2) to formulate an ontologico-epistemological account of the relation between Nature and Spirit beginning from the standpoint of the subjective. By offering a philosophy from this standpoint, transcendental idealism complements *Naturephilosophy*'s starting point from the objective and edifies its ultimate end—*the manifestation of the Absolute*.

Like in Nature, Schelling regards the self as a concentrated point of potency; in this context, however, the potencies are *primarily* spiritual and only *become* natural through a process of self-manifestation (from the subjective to the objective). Chapter II will thus centre on the proposition from the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (henceforth referred to as *System*) that the self is what is *brought forth* (that which one “brings forth”)<sup>140</sup>. In other words, the self is the activity of *bringing forth*, of manifesting. As we will explore and discover, there is an identity between the concept of self as activity, *doing*, and eternal becoming and the notion of Nature (*natura naturans*) presented in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), which, as

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 29.

we saw in the previous chapter, argues that Nature must be understood as a productivity which sets its own boundaries and limits (self-producing and limiting Nature).

The task of transcendental idealism then, as Schelling defines it, is 1) to account for the “original genesis of consciousness<sup>141</sup>,” and 2) to answer the question, “how does nature come to be presented<sup>142</sup>?” The former question is ontological, as it seeks consciousness’ origin—that which makes it possible; the latter question is epistemological, asking how Nature is constructed *into* “presentations” for the self, i.e. how does it come to be known. Because the self is the starting point of Schelling’s investigation in the *System*, the task he gives himself is to account for how Nature (or the objective portion of consciousness) comes to be from *out of* the self. When considered together, the self and Nature represent two sides of knowledge (or of knowing), i.e. the subject and the object respectively. Together they make possible the *consciousness-of* something: the self and Nature together form the possibility of consciousness. In the *System*, the story of consciousness’ emergence posits a *division* between the self and Nature somewhat analogous to the emergence of organic life as detailed in Chapter I. The split signified by consciousness rests on what Schelling calls “the absolutely identical” which must have already divided itself in order for it to seek an objective knowing of itself<sup>143</sup>; this is the work of the self and by extension the genesis of the objective world “outside us.”

As we saw in the *Naturephilosophy* with the organic product, selfhood eventually emerges from a process in Nature that begins with what Schelling calls a “tearing loose

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 230.

from universal nature<sup>144</sup>”; this represents the moment of original division of Nature. What differs in transcendental idealism is that the division which makes consciousness possible emanates from the self, not from Nature. Schelling asserts that as consciousness emerges as intelligence “it must oppose the succession” [of objective presentations] “to itself, in order to intuit itself therein<sup>145</sup>”; thus “Nature” is to be regarded as an object posited from out of the self’s inner being and necessity. In effect, Schelling’s philosophy of Spirit (transcendental idealism) is a reversal of Kant’s idealism. Whereas Kant insists that Nature must be purely objective—separated from the subjective by an epistemological gulf—Schelling attempts to think Nature as “subjective synthesis.” Bearing this point in mind, the *telos* of the self’s imposed opposition to itself is the recognition that its nature is *productivity* rather than mere producthood<sup>146</sup>. In other words, by opposing itself to the self-produced “presentations” of world, the self sets the necessary conditions to become aware of its synthetic, dynamic nature<sup>147</sup>.

Reflection through posited Nature plays a pivotal role in the self’s ongoing process of *becoming-self-conscious*; it ultimately reveals the essential productivity on which products rest. Reflection is thus a moment of consciousness, a mode of the self and an inhibited form of originary productivity, through which Spirit must journey toward transcendental knowing of itself. As we will see, in reflection the self turns toward itself to be for itself, but in so doing recognizes that its being exceeds its grasp; its being is in excess of its capacity to comprehend and know both itself and that which is not-itself

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<sup>144</sup> Schelling, *First Outline*, 65.

<sup>145</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 121.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

(Nature). In effect, just as we saw in the context of Nature in Chapter I, Schelling again attempts to grasp the curious link between dependence (heteronomy, necessity) and independence (autonomy, freedom), only this time within Spirit. This is the paradox of independence (autonomy) and dependence (heteronomy): the individual must simultaneously assert its individual existence, while remaining dependent upon an *other*, in this case Nature, which is never fully reconciled. Thus, reflection is a mode of selfhood which pushes the self to overreach and overextend itself. Reflection is the moment when the self intuits its potential, as well as its incapacity to fulfill the potential through pure (theoretical) reason and discursive knowledge: “[...] the intelligence must appear to itself as an organic individual<sup>148</sup>.” Recognizing its organic nature and its individuality, the individual becomes aware of its limitedness; the self “becomes wholly limited<sup>149</sup>.” As Schelling conceives it, the problem then centres on the relation between the inherent limitedness of the self and its freedom to transform beyond its self-given limits. This chapter will explore this problem in more detail.

Charting the general outline of the self’s trajectory from infinite productivity to objective reality in the forms of *art* and *history*, this chapter is divided into four sections which follow a similar pattern and structure as Chapter I. Section I looks at the postulate and first condition of transcendental idealism, the notion that the self, in its most basic and primitive form, must be grasped as infinite activity or “eternal becoming.” In other words, the self is not a static and fixed reality but a *doing*. This notion leads into the second section of the chapter which looks at the second condition of transcendental

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

idealism: the dialectical nature of the self. The self is to be grasped as *activity*, and a *producing activity at that*, i.e. an activity which produces *something*; furthermore, its activity consists of two distinct poles or tendencies variously identified as “the self,” “I” or “the ideal and “the not-self,” “not-I” or “the real.” Together these tendencies produce dialectic, a spiritual equivalent to natural polarity. The third section of this chapter will look at what I refer to as the third condition of transcendental idealism: what Schelling refers to as the “twofold series of actions” or *the necessary* and *the free*. This distinction plays a role in understanding the significance of and difference between theoretical and practical philosophy; it also sets the stage for the fourth condition, i.e. the notion that selfhood (*or* self-consciousness) emerges according to three distinct epochs. Together these epochs compose what Schelling calls “the odyssey of the spirit<sup>150</sup>.”

### **3.1 The Postulate and First Condition: The Self as Activity, Eternal Becoming**

The postulate and first condition of Schelling’s transcendental idealism is his concept of the self. Just as Nature was conceived as primordial activity and amounted to a form of productivity, Schelling defines the self in similar terms. The self is variously described as “absolutely free action<sup>151</sup>,” “unconditioned<sup>152</sup>,” not “a thing” but “a doing<sup>153</sup>,” as “becoming<sup>154</sup>” and as “the ground—and inner principle, of all reality<sup>155</sup>.” The self as unconditioned, free and as ground is the soil from which transcendental idealism will sprout and bloom. Yet Schelling’s *very* postulation of a concept of self necessitates that

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 36.

the transcendental perspective from which Schelling's brand of idealism will be constructed is assumed and the construction already underway. This is because the self *as* concept, and as beginning point of idealism<sup>156</sup>, is a *postulate*. The self "is itself an absolutely free action, and so cannot be demonstrated, but only demanded; so if the self is itself this intuition merely, it too, as principle of philosophy, is itself merely something that is postulated<sup>157</sup>." It is worth noting that Schelling understands the "postulate" as something in between the "theorem" (signifying theoretical philosophy) and the "command" (signifying practical philosophy)<sup>158</sup>. Philosophical postulates thus begin from a middle ground, so to speak, between the theoretical and the practical; perhaps because of this neutrality, the postulate is able to initiate a transcendental investigation and unify the former and the latter under a single overarching philosophy—*transcendental idealism*.

As postulate the self is what Schelling starts with *and from* in order to make possible a transcendental philosophy from the perspective of the subjective. The self is thus the condition for the possibility of the philosophical position to be outlined in the *System*. But as a condition, the self is conceived of as absolutely free and in need of no conditions to support itself; in this respect, the self is in fact unconditioned<sup>159</sup>. On this basis, and with the end (*telos*) of transcendental idealism in mind, Schelling states that transcendental philosophy "proceeds from no existent, but from a free act, and such an act can only be postulated<sup>160</sup>." The nature of the self is not considered already or immediately

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 33: "[...] the beginning and end of this philosophy is freedom, the absolute indemonstrable, authenticated only through itself."

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 28.

present *to* the self but that it must be brought forth *by* the self<sup>161</sup>: “What the self is, we experience only by bringing it forth, for nowhere but in the self is the identity of being and producing fundamental<sup>162</sup>.” The notion at work is that the self is both producer and that which it produces (the produced); moreover, the self must reach a point where this distinction is not regarded as an absolute, irreconcilable duality but where the two halves are regarded as immediately and absolutely one<sup>163</sup>. Notwithstanding the identity of producer and produced (“self=self<sup>164</sup>”), the distinction remains intact and, as we will begin to see in section two of this chapter, is necessary to the self’s manifestation. According to Schelling, the proposition “self=self” converts the typical proposition of identity (A=A) into a synthetic proposition. The point is that what appears as a simple statement of two *identical* states of affairs (self *as* producer and self *as* produced), or logical equivalence, is really an attempt to think through the difference of being (object) and thinking (subject) in order to demonstrate the original identity which makes possible consciousness<sup>165</sup>.

Although Schelling defines the self as “a higher concept than that of a thing, namely the concept of doing, or activity<sup>166</sup>,” the postulation of self as “free activity” does not account for the fact of the objective world; nor does it account for the self’s knowledge (intuition) of itself as free activity. The concept in itself is insufficient to an understanding of the objective and subjective dimensions of the self. Free activity *as such* does not imply or contain the concepts of subject and object (subjective and objective). It

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 32.



is possible that free activity, or alternatively *free productivity*, will produce such concepts provided a form of counter-activity is present and brought to bear over and against the self's original unconditioned, unrestricted freedom. In short, no object will appear, and consequently no subject will exist, so long as there is only the free activity of the self. It is only by limiting itself that the self comes to intuit itself as "an infinite becoming<sup>167</sup>." This means that *becoming* is unthinkable without the self-given limitations of the self; becoming can only be thought under a condition of limitation and restraint. Under this condition, which is a *demand* the self places on itself, the self grasps its unbounded-bounded nature. The boundary of the self's striving is composed of two aspects borne out in a variety of dualities: the subject and the object, the real and the ideal, etc. This is because Schelling understands self-consciousness as "one absolute synthesis<sup>168</sup>"; and in order to produce a synthesis there must be at least two basic elements to be brought into relation. In effect, the self is the subject-object, or the ideal-real<sup>169</sup>. The composite nature of the self comes about from its "urge to produce the infinite<sup>170</sup>," which is only possible through the self-demand to be limited and finite: the unlimited will be expressed within the limited. The point is not that subject and object merge into a single, overarching identity, or that the ideal and real boundaries of the self's activity fuse to produce a single power; rather, a tension between the opposing elements is sustained. In fact, the self is nothing else but the sustenance of this tension, or, as Schelling phrases it in one passage,

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 44.

“a mutual interrelation of the two opposing elements therein<sup>171</sup>.” The emphasis, it seems, should be placed on the interrelatedness of the elements, the fact that the self brings them to bear on one another. This continuous process is, in effect, both the freedom of the self, its urge to manifest infinity, and its necessity, the fact that what it manifests is nothing other than its own nature<sup>172</sup>.

### **3.2 The Second Condition: Spiritual Polarity, the Dialectic of Self and Nature**

In this section we will consider a general outline of the self’s activity and explore how this activity produces reality. We will also consider how Schelling’s notion of spiritual polarity, or *dialectic*, differentiates Schelling’s concepts of self and subjectivity from those of Kant and, especially, Fichte. Schelling is clear that the self must be taken as the starting point of transcendental idealism; the self is “the ground—and inner principle, of all reality<sup>173</sup>.” In this respect, his concept of self might seem quite close, if not the same, as Fichte’s; however, there are important differences that will be explored later in this section. First, we must consider how Schelling describes the self’s constitutive activity through its positing of Nature. Nature—the other of the self—is a product of the self’s productivity (activity and limitation) and it is through this antithesis that the nature of Spirit is to be discovered<sup>174</sup>. As interpreters, we should note that the self’s productivity, as well as the construction of a philosophy that begins from the subjective, poses a problem relative to *Naturephilosophy*; effectively, the two philosophies appear immediately

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 186.

incompatible and irreconcilable, given that they begin from opposing perspectives. This presents a paradox at the heart of Schelling's philosophy circa 1799 and 1800; a paradox that we have already flagged but that must be kept in mind at all times. As noted in Chapter I, Schelling seems to have his cake and eat it too; he is attempting to construct a philosophy that affirms Nature as autonomous and free that is nonetheless dependent on the fact of subjective synthesis. The tension between these two goals remains a part of Schelling's dualistic philosophy, i.e. his *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism. Schelling begins to work out the tension only in 1801, as part of his treatise *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, which will receive some attention in the Conclusion. Returning then to Schelling's transcendental idealism, the second condition of the self is that it consists of a conflict of absolutely opposed activities or tendencies<sup>175</sup>. The first tendency "originally reaches out into infinity"; this is "the real, the objective, limitable activity<sup>176</sup>"; the second is an inclination "to intuit oneself in that infinity" and "is called the ideal, subjective, illimitable activity<sup>177</sup>." These activities recall the repulsive and expansive forces of Nature theorized as part of *Naturephilosophy*. In effect, what occurs in Nature also occurs in Spirit. The origin of the former's activities is from the objective standpoint moving toward the subjective, whereas the latter moves in the opposite direction.

In its original state the self lacks for all qualities and predicates of *thinghood* including *existence* itself. Schelling describes this state in the following way:

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

Since the self actually possesses none of the predicates that attach to things, we have an explanation of the paradox that one cannot say of the self that it *exists*. For one cannot say of the self that it exists, precisely because it is *being-itself*. The eternal, timeless act of self-consciousness which we call *self*, is that which gives all things existence, and so itself needs no other being to support it<sup>178</sup>.

The self in its original state is self-given and self-sufficient. Yet it is effectively nothing, or, at minimum, nothing existent. If the self were to remain nothing but free unlimited activity, *mere* being-itself, then its activity would not amount to much; its productivity would in fact produce nothing at all. Schelling thus identifies an urge within the self to manifest something from its infinite activity. The self's *urgency* is what drives its activity to production. Partly on the influence of Fichte's philosophy, Schelling finds that the self must follow an ontologico-epistemological path *outside itself*, i.e. outside the unity of the self's infinite potency *in itself*. The self must first divide itself—make a duality of its infinity—in order ultimately to produce an awareness of its unity as self-consciousness<sup>179</sup>. The self accomplishes this end by identifying two distinct tendencies within its nature.

Schelling describes them in the following way:

The self has an urge to produce the infinite, and this tendency must be thought of as directed *outwards* (as centrifugal), but it is not distinguishable as such without an activity regressively directed *inwards* to the self as center. The outgoing, by nature infinite activity is the objective in the self; the self-reverting activity is nothing else but the striving to intuit oneself in infinitude. Through this action as such, the inner and the outer are divided within the self, and with their separation is posited a conflict in the self that only the necessity of self-consciousness can explain<sup>180</sup>.

Spiritual polarity thus consists of two activities, one which is without limitation (the centrifugal) and the second (the centripetal) which reverts back to the self as “centre.”

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 44.

These activities together form a genuine duality at work within the self; they are the tendencies and activity of Spirit.

Spirit is not driven by a single *urges*—the urge to produce infinity; it is driven by contrary urges to be both infinite and finite simultaneously. This is the condition of spiritual polarity (*dialectic*): the self desires to reach out of itself to seek what may be contained within infinity but having done so the self also withdraws back into itself in order to mediate its infinite activity within self-imposed limits. The contrast is between producing something other than itself and producing nothing but itself. In its most basic form, spiritual polarity is composed of the dynamic of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies. This form serves as the basis for a multitude of dichotomies essential to Schelling's demonstration of transcendental idealism. Among these are the distinctions of the objective (object) and the subjective (subject), Nature and self, thing and concept, etc. The distinction between object and subject is crucial to Schelling's epistemology but it is not the most basic formulation of spiritual polarity; rather they are forms which are generated by dialectic in order that the self may objectify itself and, coincidentally, *subjectify* (make a subject) itself in order for the self to make an object of itself *through* Nature. The object-subject distinction is how the self grasps itself; it represents in fundamental terms the identity of self-consciousness.

The identity in self-consciousness is a mediated, synthetic identity, not an original one. The most basic form of the division of self-consciousness is the identity of subject and object<sup>181</sup>. This division in consciousness separates thing (the real) from concept (the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 45.

ideal) giving the impression that Schelling offers a “two-world” theory of reality<sup>182</sup>.

However, the division is not ontologically absolute, i.e. not a permanent and irreparable rift in the self, but rather an epistemologically necessary rift. The self posits the polarity of subject and object on the basis of its own activity (of Spirit, the centrifugal and centripetal tendencies) in order to make an object of itself<sup>183</sup>. The separation is an act of self-delusion in the sense that the self as subject grasps itself as different from Nature—self as object<sup>184</sup>. Yet as misguided as the division seems it is a necessary stage on the way to self-consciousness because it allows the self to enter into a mode of reflection in which it considers its nature both as subject and as object. This mode will be described in brief later in this chapter; suffice it to say that so long as the self recognizes the object as having been self-positing, it will have understood that division and reflection are necessary to its self-given *spiritual telos*.

Schelling describes the state of the self in terms of the object-subject distinction in the following way:

The self contains fundamental opposites, namely subject and object; *they cancel one another out, and yet neither is possible without the other*. The subject asserts itself only in opposition to the object, and the object only in opposition to the subject; neither, that is, can become real without destroying the other, but the point of destruction of one by the other can never be reached, precisely because each is what it is only in opposition to the other. Both have therefore to be united, for neither can destroy the other, and yet nor can they subsist together. The conflict, therefore, is not so much a conflict between the two factors, as between the inability, on the one hand, to unite the infinite opposites, and the necessity of doing so, on the other, if the identity of self-consciousness is not to be blotted out<sup>185</sup>.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 46.

Schelling identifies two essential ends (*telos*) of the self. The first is the resistance to unity and an inclination to preserve each tendency's distinction from the other; this maintains the tension between the self's "factors" of subject and object. The second end is the necessity of uniting the factors and thereby cancelling the tension by producing a unity of the two. In essence, the conflict is an attempt to mediate the contrary ends of preserving and cancelling the tension at the core of the self. We should note that this dialectic sounds somewhat like Hegel's dialectic of *Aufheben* or *Aufhebung* (sublation), a German word literally meaning the dual actions of cancelling and preserving something. The dialectic of sublation is a distinctive element of Hegel's Absolute Idealism; it seeks to produce a third philosophical perspective synthesized from two more primitive and, therefore, less rational perspectives. Despite Schelling's description of the self's conflict, suggesting actions of cancelling and preserving, Hegel's dialectic is different from Schelling's. In the above quoted passage, for instance, Schelling does not mention any kind of sublation or need for a third category which synthesizes the self's two opposing drives or urges. For Schelling, there is no need for a third; rather, the *aporia* between the two conflicting activities is what makes the interaction productive; to fill that gap, so to speak, would decelerate all of the self's (Spirit) activity. Historically, Schelling's dialectic was influential on Hegel and his development of Absolute Idealism; however, there are significant differences between Schelling's and Hegel's philosophies and the latter is not reducible to the former. We will not dwell on this point further; however, an appendix has been added that presents a brief comparison of Schelling's and Hegel's respective philosophies.

Schelling's notion of spiritual polarity contains interesting implications for the nature of consciousness (cognition) and freedom. First, Schelling's first insight into the polarity of Spirit is that consciousness ultimately cannot be regarded as self-sufficient. This is because the activity of Spirit is not something that the self immediately grasps but comes to see only through its reflection in Nature; the self as subject thus depends on something outside itself. To further define this point, Schelling posits "a region of consciousness where this separation" between subject and object "does not yet exist, and where inner and outer worlds are conceived as interfused"<sup>186</sup>. This region is the "unconscious."

Schelling holds a distinctive place in the history of the concept of the unconscious, as has been shown in a recent book by S. J. McGrath<sup>187</sup>. Schelling's earliest conception of the unconscious is found in his *System*; historically, it also represents the first explicit conceptualization of the unconscious. In the *System*, Schelling presents what could be termed a "teleological unconscious." This idea of the unconscious identifies hidden ends (*telos*) in history and the self which nonetheless drive the whole movement and development of organic and spiritual life. Part of Schelling's project is to articulate the reality of Nature as the ground of spiritual being. Although Schelling's project is a form of idealism as he too regards freedom as an activity of the subject in a world otherwise restricted by laws of natural necessity, he departs from typical idealism as he *makes explicit* the necessity of an unconscious ground for consciousness (a formulation of the identity of necessity and freedom). In comparison, Fichte posited that freedom must

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>187</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*.



ground all of philosophy; free activity of the subject amounts to self-positing<sup>188</sup>. The self posits itself first as self or “I” and then as not-self or “not-I”; similar to the way Schelling posits Nature as the opposite, or other, of the self.

The *System* is in part Schelling’s attempt to incorporate aspects of Fichte’s Subjective Idealism into a more comprehensive philosophy, i.e. one that does not limit itself to the subjective. According to Fichte, the subject recognizes that the positing of both self and not-self is dependent on a higher superstructure or condition—the “Transcendental Subject<sup>189</sup>.” Knowledge of the Transcendental Subject is not achieved deductively or analytically but through an intellectual synthesis of the mutually occurring concepts of self and not-self. Self-positing occurs regardless of the thought process of the subject; it is *active* and *unconscious*. Schelling grasps this implication and exploits it in order to clarify Fichte’s conception of the not-self by explicitly identifying it, in the *System*, with both unconsciousness and Nature. The unconscious plays into Schelling’s idea that freedom is not without restriction. Freedom requires a counterpart, i.e., necessity or limitation. The self’s original drive for freedom—to *bring forth*—is quelled and brought under constraint because it simultaneously posits its own limitation. The self sets limits to its production; this is how it becomes an object for itself and how self-consciousness unfolds. Schelling makes this plainly clear in the following, “[...] in the concept of positing we also necessarily think the concept of a counterpositing, and thus in the action of self-positing we likewise have a positing of something opposed to the

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<sup>188</sup> Johann Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, trans. Peter Heath and John Lachs (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970), 97.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

self<sup>190</sup>.” Through the simultaneous acts of positing and counterpositing, the self delimits the bounds of its being; together these dual activities compose “the mechanism of the self”—derived from the presupposition of the conflict of activities<sup>191</sup>.

Before Schelling, Fichte had defined freedom by eliminating Kant’s concept of the thing-in-itself. For Fichte, the thing-in-itself was unnecessary and no aid to an account of self and Nature. Instead, Fichte argues that subjectivity has only one activity, the free activity of self-positing. The act by which the self posits itself is already unconscious in Fichte, although he does not explicitly identify it *as such*. Moreover, Fichte understands the significance of freedom to be ethical, not aesthetic as Schelling understands it (this point will be explored further later in this chapter). For Fichte, the self is always striving to catch up with itself *morally*; this infinite activity, which, to some extent, frustrates the self, is also what constitutes it *as such*. In this regard, Fichte’s conception of the self cannot be reduced to the Cartesian “I think”; it actually expands the subjectivist concept of self. However, it also fails to recognize that the self is grounded in that which is genuinely other than self. Insofar as there is a thing-in-itself in Fichte’s system, it is given by subjectivity itself; it is not a trace of something beyond the faculties of understanding and sensibility. In other words, self, and reason with it, is necessarily self-limiting and reason gives itself its own boundaries; moreover, the self is capable of grasping the extent of these boundaries completely. Schelling’s position, in contrast, is more sophisticated, treating Nature as a positive reality unto itself, albeit one that is dependent on the self’s productive capacity. (This is another instance of the paradox at the core of Schelling’s

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<sup>190</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 37.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

philosophy—the attempt to have both Nature and the self, *each one* unto themselves, making the other possible and yet being utterly dependent on the other.)

Schelling summarizes the difference between his philosophical approach and Fichte's in his *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801): "Fichte might have held an idealism relative to the standpoint of reflection, whereas I situated myself and the principle of idealism at the standpoint of production<sup>192</sup>." In Fichte's account, Nature is only a mirror for subjectivity; the subject posits opposition, which Nature thenceforth signifies<sup>193</sup>. For Fichte, Nature is an otherness posited so that subjectivity may overcome it by appropriating Nature into subjectivity itself, i.e., by rendering Nature a guise of Transcendental Subjectivity, rather than affirming it as genuine otherness and a reality unto itself. Schelling noticed that by grounding freedom in the otherness of Nature, Fichte was in effect grounding consciousness in unconsciousness; there is, therefore, a necessary element of unconsciousness in consciousness and an element of the genuinely not-self in the self. Schelling thus affirms the reality of Nature; moreover, he affirms that Nature signifies the unconsciousness of selfhood: Schelling calls it "the original, as yet unconscious, poetry of the spirit<sup>194</sup>."

The final sections of the *System* are a first formal attempt to think the meaning of an unconscious part of the self. By grounding freedom in unconsciousness, Schelling expands Fichte's concept of freedom to include territory, so to speak, that is not immediately, if ever, accessible to reason. Unconsciousness signifies something

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<sup>192</sup> Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," 345.

<sup>193</sup> Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*, 113.

<sup>194</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 12.

irrational, or at least something non-rational—*that is* outside the purview of rationality<sup>195</sup>. In effect, Schelling opens up a new dimension of selfhood; no longer is the self merely a rational agent of efficient freedom but the ground of becoming. Whereas Fichte and Kant before him place freedom squarely within [subjective] cognition, Schelling places freedom outside of cognition, perhaps, in a sense, *underneath* cognition in the original identity of the self, thereby giving it a non-rational and non-subjective basis.

Michael Vater calls Schelling's project, circa 1800, "the recourse to a hypothesis of a pre-established harmony of freedom and determinism<sup>196</sup>." The pre-established harmony of freedom and determinism is what Schelling calls the Absolute. It is the identity between freedom and necessity, the self and Nature, and the subjective and the objective. The introduction of this pre-established harmony redefines the idealist project, if we understand idealism as an attempt to affirm the reality of freedom and autonomy in a world otherwise determined by natural necessity. Schelling does not conceive of freedom as independence from external determination; rather, freedom is wrapped up in external determination to the extent that freedom and necessity together equal the Absolute. Effectively, being and thinking are constituted by consciousness *and* unconsciousness. On this point, Schelling writes, "Freedom is to be necessity, and necessity freedom. But now in contrast to freedom, necessity is nothing else but the unconscious. That which exists in me without consciousness is involuntary; that which

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<sup>195</sup> Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism*, 121. Snow writes that Schelling's discovery is that "in order to account for the constraint and irrationality of the world of experience, the workings of the law of reason must be at least partly hidden from us."

<sup>196</sup> Michael Vater, introduction to *System of Transcendental Idealism*, by F.W.J. Schelling (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), xv.

exists with consciousness is in me through my willing<sup>197</sup>.” Schelling’s goal is not the affirmation of freedom in spite of determinism but the relation between the two—the *Absolute*. He recognizes that there is a portion of selfhood that cannot *appear to* and *for* consciousness in the direct and explicit way that spontaneous, efficient freedom implies because it defies conscious presentation (the category *consciousness-of*). This portion is precisely what Schelling describes as existing “without consciousness” and is therefore “involuntary.” Furthermore, Schelling explains that the nature of action can be considered from two contrary positions: subjectively, I—conscious self—act; objectively, something unconscious acts through me<sup>198</sup>. Both the subjective and objective ways of considering an action resolve in the self, but represent two distinct elements, namely the conscious and the unconscious. Schelling posits an identity between the two. By identity, Schelling does not mean that the two are reducible to one another; rather, the conscious sense of an action, i.e., that it appears “free,” is dependent on the unconscious sense of the action, i.e., the action is not free but occurs within a limited state of being. In this way, Schelling presents a “teleological unconscious”: the self through Nature is purposive; it is directed toward a particular end (*telos*) regardless of whether the end has been or will be made explicit and conscious to the subject. Schelling thus concludes that the self’s productivity is largely unconscious; thus, the ends (*telos*) toward which the self moves are actualized according to an unwritten plan, so to speak, that nevertheless follows a particular design. Action remains unconsciously determined even as it is consciously and freely

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<sup>197</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 204.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 212-13.

undertaken<sup>199</sup>. This is what Schelling means when he writes that “[T]he self is conscious in respect of production, unconscious in regard to the product<sup>200</sup>.” The subject knows that something is generated through its activity; precisely what is generated remains outside the purview of human consciousness. The point is concerned with subjectivity’s capacity to determine the outcome of unconscious productivity.

The self and Nature are not mechanisms without a program or design, *à la* Hume or perhaps even Kant circa the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781); their distinctive productivities are bound up with history—the progressive realization of the single, infinite ideal which Schelling calls the Absolute<sup>201</sup>. Schelling’s account of Spirit’s journey to self-knowledge is articulated according to a series of three “epochs,” wherein each epoch represents a particular stage of Spirit’s self-knowing, its progress from unconsciousness to consciousness on the way to self-consciousness. The division of Spirit’s odyssey into three epochs is the fourth significant condition of Schelling’s transcendental idealism; it hinges on the notion of the self as historical being, i.e. its historicity. But before we consider the nature of these epochs, we must consider the third condition, i.e. that which explains the necessity of introducing the concept of “epoch” in the first place. This condition is what Schelling calls “the twofold series of actions<sup>202</sup>.”

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 48.

### 3.3 The Third Condition: The Twofold Series of Actions, the Necessary and the Free

The conflict of the self's opposing activities does not resolve in one single action (unity) but is continuous in an "infinite series of actions"<sup>203</sup>. The third condition of Schelling's transcendental idealism is his notion of a "twofold series of acts," one original and necessary and the other derived, copied, imitated and free. Without this distinction there is no possibility of transcendental idealism<sup>204</sup>. To put it somewhat crudely, the twofold series signifies *the being of the self* (the first series) and *self-knowledge* (the second series). Thomas Pfau argues that the notion of a twofold series of actions is an appropriation of the Platonic concept of *anamnesis* and therefore represents a process through which the self *unforgets* or remembers its nature to itself<sup>205</sup>. There is good reason to accept Pfau's interpretation as Schelling's [concept of] self is deeply and necessarily engaged in a process through which it comes to a more complete knowledge of itself. The odyssey of Spirit may not be entirely Platonic but it is a journey of self-knowledge.

Schelling writes of the twofold series of acts:

So long as the self is apprehended in its original evolution of the absolute synthesis, there is only one series of acts, that of the original and necessary acts of the self; as soon as I interrupt this evolution, and freely project myself back to its starting-point, there arises for me a new series, in which what was necessary in the first series is now free. The former is the original, the latter the copy or imitation. If the second series contains no more and no less than the first, the imitation is perfect, and a true and complete philosophy is engendered. In the opposite case, the result is a false and incomplete one<sup>206</sup>.

The notion of the "twofold series of acts" suggests that at a certain point in its *becoming* the self apprehends its basic activity in two distinct ways. The first series is the *original*

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas Pfau, critical introduction to *Idealism and the Endgame of Theory: Three Essays by F.W.J. Schelling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 31.

<sup>206</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 49.

and *necessary* manifestation of the self and its objective counterpart (Nature). This first series may signify the self's *being* and unconscious self-manifestation; *as such*, the first series represents the necessary ground—the condition—on which all knowledge of the self becomes possible. The second series is a kind of interruption of the first and the emergence of a second parallel series of *actions*. It is a rendering conscious and free of the otherwise unconscious and necessary series. The second series does not erase or replace the first but parallels it; it coexists alongside the first as if the latter were imitating the former and thus duplicating it. The first series of actions thus serves as an *unconscious* principle relative to the second.

Schelling characterizes the second series by “interruption” and “retrospectiveness,” i.e. a capacity to disrupt the “evolution” of the first series by having the self turn on the series itself and look back to its ground. It seems that the second series, which Schelling describes as a copy or imitation, is an artificially generated series from out of the *conscious-freedom*, or productivity of the self made conscious, as opposed to its *unconscious-necessity* which first initiates its manifestation. The second series opens up the self to its own historicity, i.e. the fact of its own historical being; within the series the self sees that its being consists of an ongoing conflict of opposing activities, as well as the fact that its awareness of this conflict unfolds only gradually and deepens the further one investigates. Whereas the first series of acts may be conceived as a kind of mathematical space-time, the groundwork for the possibility of consciousness (the second series), the latter transforms the mathematical space-time of the self into a dynamic historical progression such that the self sees itself as having passed through a series of “epochs” (effectively stages) which begin in a state of unconsciousness and pass through



primitive consciousness on the way to self-consciousness. Philosophy is thus defined as “the free imitation, the free recapitulation of the original series of acts<sup>207</sup>.” And yet the complete enumeration of original actions within the second series is an infinite task and, therefore, ultimately impossible. Schelling thus limits his exploration of self-consciousness to its overarching epochs<sup>208</sup>.

In summation, the first series of actions makes possible the second series, which, in turn, makes possible the self’s explanation and theorization of the three distinct stages of its becoming. The concept of the twofold series of actions is the basis for Schelling’s theory of *the three epochs of selfhood*. The end (*telos*) of philosophy thus becomes “a history of self-consciousness”; and philosophy seeks this end in order to account for how the various epochs of selfhood are interrelated and how they combine to produce what Schelling calls “one absolute synthesis<sup>209</sup>.” As we will soon discover, the art product is the apex of Schelling’s aesthetic imagination and, therefore, of practical philosophy, but *history* emerges as a primary object of philosophy: the reality of historical consciousness and being. This idea or thematic is first formulated in Schelling’s concept of the *epochs of selfhood*.

### **3.4 The Fourth Condition: The Epochs of Selfhood, the “Odyssey of Spirit”**

Coplestone writes that *Naturephilosophy* is the development of “a systematic ideal construction of Nature<sup>210</sup>.” In this respect, *Naturephilosophy* is theoretical; it is a

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Coplestone, *History of Philosophy*, 109.

deduction of Nature, or construction, from first principles. One implication of Schelling's conception of Nature is that in constructing Nature from first principles Nature is in fact constructing itself through what Coplestone calls "the watchful attention of the mind"<sup>211</sup>. This is why *Naturephilosophy* is transcendental; it seeks the conditions for the possibility of Nature. This point also applies to transcendental idealism; the difference is that the latter is a systematic *real construction of Spirit*; the goal of which is an account of the possibility of self-consciousness. In this second to last section of Chapter II, we will consider *in brief* how Schelling outlines the *practical* genesis of consciousness (the self) and its *history*, which, according to Schelling, manifest through a series of three specific "epochs." These epochs represent phases of the continuous history of self-consciousness<sup>212</sup>. The first epoch moves from original or primitive sensation to productive intuition. It is composed of the construction of the material from out of Spirit; this production is unconscious because Spirit has yet to become conscious<sup>213</sup>. At this stage, Spirit unconsciously constructs its other—Nature—as a first step in its journey toward self-consciousness and self-knowledge. This epoch thus defines the nature of primitive matter from the vantage point of Spirit. From this perspective, matter is inferior to mind; Schelling's position falls within a line of idealist thinkers that held a similar viewpoint. Schelling acknowledges this inheritance; he cites Leibniz who regarded matter as "the sleeping state of monads" and the 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch philosopher François Hemsterhuis (1721-1790) who understood matter as "congealed mind," a notion echoed

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 236.

<sup>213</sup> Coplestone, *History of Philosophy*, 116.

by Schelling in his statement that matter is “mind in a condition of dullness<sup>214</sup>.” We can assume that matter will be elevated to a higher state of being through the two subsequent epochs as Spirit further actualizes its potentiality.

The second epoch moves from productive intuition to reflection. During this epoch the self develops sensibility and begins to attain an awareness of external objects distinct from itself, if only at the level of the sensible<sup>215</sup>. In order for this basic sense of the objective to be possible this epoch contains the deduction of space, time, and causality; in effect, a world begins to exist for the self. This is in part achieved through the self’s reflection on its own nature. While the construction of the object (as matter) takes place during the first epoch, the second epoch attempts to explain how the self in the form of subject begins to distinguish itself from object. The distinction is accomplished through reflection, the end point of this epoch, and produces a conceptual separation between the self as subject and the self as object.

Reflection, as a mode of the self, contains several “conditions.” The first is transcendental abstraction, which explains how the self begins its separation from its object by distinguishing between intuition and concept. Although abstraction accomplishes this first division, it does not account for how the two are then reunited under judgment so as to avoid the impression of an irreparable division suggesting two distinct and unrelated worlds, i.e. that of the object and that of the subject<sup>216</sup>. Schema connects intuition and concept and thereby intermediates outer and inner sense. To a certain degree, reflection introduces a temporary separation between a reflected object

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<sup>214</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 92.

<sup>215</sup> Coplestone, *History of Philosophy*, 116.

<sup>216</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 142.

(Nature) and a reflecting subject (the self); this is to establish the necessary conditions for the self to know itself. Schelling qualifies the self as that which “seeks itself, but in so doing actually flees from itself<sup>217</sup>.” In fleeing itself, the self establishes a degree of separation from itself *as* Nature; without positing object and subject, as the constituent elements of worldly being and knowledge, the self, and by extension Nature, cannot achieve its *telos* of becoming “wholly an object to herself<sup>218</sup>.” This sets the stage for the self’s realization of itself as a concretely existing being.

Finally, the third epoch moves from reflection to the absolute act of will; at this stage the self has become fully an object to itself and seeks to fulfill itself in the objective world<sup>219</sup>. To this end, the third epoch is when the self discovers other selves and seeks to transform the objective world (Nature) in accordance with ideals it deduces from both itself and its newly found community of selves; in effect, this is the stage in which a social-political order becomes possible<sup>220</sup>. Because the ideals are deduced from the self, it is in effect attempting to realize itself, i.e. complete itself according to its inner *telos*<sup>221</sup>. This maintains the notion of self-manifestation; the highest end of the self is conformity to the *law of manifestation*. As the third epoch is defined by “the absolute act of the will,” manifestation is defined by concrete action in the world; in this respect, manifestation is no longer limited to the realm of the theoretical but becomes a *practice of the self*.

Still within the bounds of the third epoch of selfhood, Schelling’s transcendental idealism culminates with a discussion of the nature of the work of art, what Schelling

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 120-21.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>219</sup> Coplestone, *History of Philosophy*, 116.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

describes as a “removal of the invisible barrier dividing the real from the ideal world<sup>222</sup>.” The self’s unconscious purposiveness is directed not only toward subjective or self-centred ends (*telos*) but toward universal ends that concern both the growth and evolution of the natural world and the development and progress of humanity; the nature of these ends is most potently expressed in the work of art. Like Fichte, Schelling posits a dependent relation between theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy wherein the former precedes but is only completed by the latter; however, the significance of Schelling’s practical philosophy is not the same as Fichte’s. Fichte’s practical philosophy is primarily concerned with ethics and the determination of man’s moral constitution as an ethical being always striving to catch up with itself. For Schelling, in contrast, practical philosophy is aesthetic and is directed toward the creative production of world and self. In effect, Schelling argues that the ethical is grounded in the aesthetic because the latter better symbolizes the ground and production of world and subjectivity. The making of the subject and knowledge is like the making of a work of art not like the determination of a particular moral-political order, as was so important to Fichte both philosophically and personally. This is the major difference between the two practical philosophies. Schelling describes the aesthetic near the beginning of the *System* when he writes:

In philosophizing, one is not simply the object of contemplation, but always at the same time the subject. Two conditions are therefore required for the understanding of philosophy, *first* that one be engaged in a constant inner activity, a constant producing of these original acts of the intellect; and *second*, that one be constantly reflecting upon this production; in a word, that one always remain at the same time both the intuited (the producer) and the intuitant<sup>223</sup>.

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<sup>222</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 232.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

By attending to the production of the “original acts of the intellect” the self is actually attending to the production of herself, her own production. She is being made through the complex interaction of the real and ideal activities of the self, and of the self’s unconscious (necessary) and conscious (free) *regions*.

Schelling returns to the nature of the aesthetic in the final pages of the treatise; as in the previous passage, he relates the aesthetic to the essential nature and task of philosophy:

The whole of philosophy starts, and must start, from a principle which, as the absolute principle, is also at the same time the absolutely identical. An absolutely simple and identical cannot be grasped or communicated through description, nor through concepts at all. It can only be intuited. Such an intuition is the organ of all philosophy.—But this intuition, which is an intellectual rather than a sensory one, and has as its object neither the objective nor the subjective, but the absolutely identical, in itself neither subjective nor objective, is itself merely an internal one, which cannot in turn become objective for itself: it can become objective only through a second intuition. This second intuition is the aesthetic<sup>224</sup>.

The notion of “intellectual intuition” mentioned in the above passage is not a cognitive act; it is not an intuition *of something* within empirical consciousness, nor is it empirically known or demonstrable. The kind of *intuition* in question is more obscure than that; it does not signify the awareness of an object, not even the self itself as object. Rather, this *intuition* is the self’s activity, the process of becoming; as such, this non-objective knowing, this intuition, is a part of the self’s activity. Schelling thus qualifies intellectual intuition as “a type of knowing utterly different from ordinary knowledge<sup>225</sup>.” It is “absolutely free” and defined by non-duality, i.e. it makes no absolute or relative

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 27.

distinction between subject and object; it is “an intuition freely productive in itself, in which producer and produced are one and the same<sup>226</sup>.”

Vater writes that intellectual intuition “is not merely an activity of, or a faculty in, the subject; it *is* the subject. The self is intellectual intuition subsistent; it exists by knowing itself in this non-objective manner<sup>227</sup>.” Vater also explains it as “an unconscious principle of consciousness; our awareness is always an intuition directed back upon a production, i.e. upon a production-intuition, an activity become objectified<sup>228</sup>.” If intellectual intuition is the self itself, it signifies both the self’s unconscious productivity as well as its conscious awareness of said productivity, from a vantage point where the two are grasped as “one and the same<sup>229</sup>.” Intellectual intuition is thus a “substrate to carry and support” transcendental philosophy and thinking; without it, the latter would simply not be possible<sup>230</sup>. Because the self is an object by virtue of knowing itself as such, Schelling calls the self “a permanent intellectual intuition<sup>231</sup>”; however, as such, the self’s knowledge and consciousness of itself and of Nature is fundamentally fragmented. This is because the self’s awareness of itself is never absolute, total and complete. It knows itself only *from* what is objectified and presented before it in finite consciousness. The intellectual intuition it seeks to know concretely and empirically cannot be objectified, but remains utterly non-objective and effectively *unconscious*. Intellectual intuition thus affords the self only an intimation of its full nature and leaves it with the frustrating and humbling realization that *as* consciousness the self is forever a fragmented and

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Vater, introduction to *System of Transcendental Idealism*, xxvii.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

<sup>229</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 27.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

incomplete reality; the self is a process, not a finished product. It should be clear then that the self conceptualized by Schelling is not identical with self-consciousness, nor is it a personal ego; rather, as McGrath aptly phrases it, “it is identical to the universe, containing within itself the forms of all things<sup>232</sup>.” The self (Spirit) is an expression of the Absolute; knowledge of this fact, according to Schelling, is afforded through intellectual intuition.

Schelling does not stop there in attempting to articulate the identity of the Absolute relative to consciousness. In order to account for how intellectual intuition functions, as well as what it provides the self, Schelling resorts to an explanation of the aesthetic and the role of the philosophy of art relative to knowledge of the Absolute. The composition of a work of art (the aesthetic) is an analogy for Schelling. It signifies what is taking place in and through intellectual intuition, in the self itself, as it seeks itself in the form of self-consciousness. An explanation of aesthetic production ensues where intellectual intuition leaves off; the former is how Schelling couches the genesis of self and phenomena from the transcendental standpoint. Schelling makes this clear near the beginning of the *System* when he writes:

[...] this coming-to-be-reflected of the absolutely non-conscious and nonobjective is possible only through an *aesthetic act* of the imagination. This much, however, is apparent from what we have already shown, namely that all philosophy is *productive*. Thus philosophy depends as much as art does on the productive capacity, and the difference between them rests merely on the different direction taken by the productive force [...] philosophical production is directed immediately inwards, so as to reflect it in intellectual intuition. The proper sense by which this type of philosophy must be apprehended is thus the *aesthetic* sense, and that is why the philosophy of art is the true organon of philosophy<sup>233</sup>.

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<sup>232</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*, 98.

<sup>233</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 13.



The aesthetic is a form of production; its product is the work of art. Philosophy too is a form of production, or at least is dependent on the *productive capacity*; its product is knowledge of Nature and self-knowledge—a very *Platonic* (and *Neoplatonic*) ideal. The term “organon” identifies the role of art relative to philosophy; art is an instrument or principle through which to interpret what philosophy is and what it does. As such, the philosophy of art *as organon* of philosophy shows us that we are each involved and engaged, if only unconsciously, in an active construction of world, experience and self. Just as with art, to philosophize is to create a product, and, by extension, to exist is to create; this too is a *Neoplatonic* idea. Plotinus describes the process of self-manifestation and self-fulfillment by way of analogy to the art of sculpture<sup>234</sup>.

Schelling’s transcendental perspective is similarly concerned with self-fulfillment; as is evident in the following passage:

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, until it is posited with all the determinations that are contained in the free and conscious act of self-consciousness<sup>235</sup>.

For Schelling, the creative or artistic genius is the fulfillment, or symbol, of Spirit’s odyssey of self-manifestation. Again, at the primitive stage of manifestation, the first epoch of Spirit, the self generates world (Nature) and itself without making a formal distinction between the two. This represents a stage of unconscious production; it is a free

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<sup>234</sup> “If you do not as yet see beauty within you, do as does the sculptor of a statue that is to be beautified: he cuts away here, he smooths it there, he makes this line lighter, this one purer, until he disengages beautiful lineaments in the marble. Do you this, too. Cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labor to make all one radiance of beauty. Never cease ‘working at the statue’ until there shines out upon you from it the divine sheen of virtue, until you see perfect ‘goodness firmly established in the stainless shrine.’” Plotinus, *The Essential Plotinus*, trans. Elmer O’Brien (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1964), 42.

<sup>235</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 90.

act, albeit not a conscious one. It is an action through which the self fulfills its inner necessity. At a later more developed stage of manifestation, the third epoch, the self becomes conscious of its capacity to generate Nature from out of itself; to a degree, it has become conscious of its unconscious (natural) productivity without knowing exactly what is to be produced. Moreover, at this stage, the self (as creative or artistic genius) consciously draws upon its inner necessity and potential to produce a freely created artificial work or product; this product is the work of art [or perhaps a system of philosophy]. Art is an extension of the self's formation as both unconscious and conscious; it symbolizes the self's drive to self-manifest—to produce itself. In this respect, it is a particular or *relative* manifestation of the self's dual nature, i.e. both its inner necessity and its freedom. The work of art is *a* free-determination of the self; furthermore, the creative genius acts unconsciously with the same power that runs through Nature. This is the basis of the unity of the real and the ideal, that the power which runs unconsciously through Nature also acts consciously within the creative genius—the artist. The power of the artist produces what Coplestone calls “the supreme objectification” of the self to itself<sup>236</sup>.

This reading of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* concludes that the primary goal of the treatise is to articulate the self's process of manifestation, what Schelling calls *the odyssey of Spirit*<sup>237</sup>. The first condition is the self as activity or productivity—the postulate that put the “system” in motion. The second condition is the self's dialectical nature, i.e. its manifestation through opposite aspects and tendencies. We might say that

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<sup>236</sup> Coplestone, *History of Philosophy*, 120.

<sup>237</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 232.

the human being is the product whose producthood consists of an inner or spiritual orientation toward itself<sup>238</sup>, i.e., an opening up of the Absolute in which it becomes aware of itself as an existing reality. As Hegel put it, reflection reveals that the identity of the Absolute does not pass fully into its appearance (Nature, self)<sup>239</sup> and yet the nature of product has no standing apart from productivity<sup>240</sup>. The being of the self *as* Absolute transcends its immanence throughout Nature; it gestures to that which Schelling describes as “the supreme absolute reality, which never itself becomes objective, but is the cause of everything that is so<sup>241</sup>.” The Absolute in-itself cannot be equated with Nature just as it cannot be equated with self-consciousness (Spirit) from the vantage point of *Naturephilosophy*. Nature and the self (Spirit) are aspects of the Absolute, *that is* relative ways in which the Absolute has elected, if only indifferently, *to manifest*.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Hegel, *Difference*, 117.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>241</sup> Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 224.

## 4. Conclusion

### Of Nature and Spirit: The Inverted Identities of the Absolute

For many years I sought to present the one philosophy that I know to be true from two wholly different sides—{both} as philosophy of nature and as transcendental philosophy<sup>242</sup>.  
—F.W.J. Schelling (1801)

For the system that appears here for the first time in its fully characteristic shape is the same one that I always had in view in the different {earlier} presentations, which I constantly used as my personal guide-star in both transcendental and natural philosophy. I never concealed from myself or from others the fact that I take neither what I term ‘transcendental philosophy’ nor what I term ‘philosophy of nature,’ each in isolation, to be the system of philosophy itself. Instead I announced in the clearest terms in the Preface to my *System of {Transcendental} Idealism*, in many places in this journal, etc., that I regard each of them as nothing more than a one-sided presentation of that system [...] I have always represented what I called philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy as the opposite poles of philosophical activity. With the present exposition I situate myself at the indifference-point {between them}; only if one has previously constructed [philosophy] from completely antithetical directions can one correctly and confidently place oneself there<sup>243</sup>.  
—F.W.J. Schelling (1801)

There are two distinct ontologico-epistemological narratives within Schelling’s early philosophy. The first is *Naturephilosophy*, constructed from the standpoint of Nature, and is characterized as the natural history of consciousness. The second is transcendental idealism, developed from the perspective of the self, and is formulated as the stages the self passes through *en route* to self-consciousness. To fuse them as a single narrative would be to lose what is original to Schelling, i.e. the binocular perspective of the Absolute from the vantage points of Nature, on one hand, and Spirit, on the other. There is no third philosophy produced for Schelling; there are only two philosophies, neither of which is adequate to explaining the nature of the Absolute. The best that Schelling can do

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<sup>242</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 343-44.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 344-45.

is to situate himself “at the indifference-point between” the two philosophies, which he attempts in his treatise *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801)<sup>244</sup>. This is a significant point; it means that unity will not be established by erasing differences but by attempting to place oneself in a position from which the identity of differences can be thought out and formulated, if only provisionally. This thesis, therefore, does not argue that *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism must be seen as one philosophy; rather they are aspects of and vantage points on the Absolute. This is why Schelling associates Nature with the self’s unconscious in the context of transcendental idealism; Nature is the manifestation of an invisible and indeterminate process of becoming constantly at work within the self.

Schelling’s insistence on an underlying *immediacy* or *original identity* offers support to the interpretation, discussed in Chapter I, that from the standpoint of *Naturephilosophy* the self is the manifestation of Nature’s invisibility; and that the self and Spirit are ultimately projections—*making visible*—of Nature’s inner necessity and potency. In effect, there are two productivities, i.e. two distinct processes underway; one is signified by Nature and the other by the self and Spirit. They appear separate but are in fact simultaneous, presupposing one another<sup>245</sup>. We might say that the Absolute moves outward in the form of Nature (*ad extra*), and inward in the form of Spirit (*ad intra*)<sup>246</sup>. As we saw in Chapter I, the outward-inward movement of polarity defines the *manifestation* of all things in Nature; Chapter II showed that a similar, albeit *inverted*, dialectic applies to Spirit.

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>245</sup> Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 36; Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 40.

<sup>246</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*, 37.

From the standpoint of Nature, polarity explains how Nature is visible Spirit and Spirit is invisible Nature<sup>247</sup>; and from the standpoint of Spirit, the self's dialectic explains how Nature and Spirit are bound to one another. Nature and Spirit exist in a bond with one another of varying degrees of organic and spiritual potency. They are what we may call *inverted identities* or, alternatively, inverted potencies. Nature is Spirit in visible form, and Spirit is Nature in invisible form. This means that that which defines Nature *as such* also exists in Spirit albeit in exact inverse proportion; and the reverse is true of Nature relative to Spirit. Inverted relations are found throughout Schelling's *corpus*; they are an inevitable result of explaining relations according to a base polarity *or* dialectic.

One later instance of potency-inversion appears in Schelling's *Stuttgart Seminars* (1810) where he affirms the notion of "essentification," which Schelling appropriates from the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Essentification is the theological doctrine that the physical body continues to exist after death but in a more essential spiritual form<sup>248</sup>. In effect, it posits the notion of spiritual corporeality. The spiritual body actually exists prior to death but in a latent or lower potency, i.e. a state of spiritual impurity due to the admixture of two principles, the spiritual and the material<sup>249</sup>. At death, an inversion occurs in which the material body and the spiritual body reverse their degrees of potency relative to one another. The material body, which existed in a higher state of potency in the material world, diminishes in proportion to the spiritual

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<sup>247</sup> Schelling, "Introduction to Ideas on a Philosophy of Nature," 202.

<sup>248</sup> Friedemann Horn, *Schelling and Swedenborg: Mysticism and German Idealism*, trans. George F. Dole (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 1997), 58-59.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. We find a similar position expressed ten years earlier in Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800): "Matter is indeed nothing else but mind viewed in an equilibrium of its activities" or as "mind in a condition of dullness"; mind is conceived as "matter merely in becoming" (Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 92).

body's increase in potency. This position challenges the dualistic conception of two absolutely distinct worlds: the earthly, fallen world and the divine world beyond. Essentification posits that the two worlds, insofar as there are two, are continuous with one another separated only by a veil of mortality. Their difference, again, is accounted for by the degrees and intensity of potencies, both material and spiritual, not by an impenetrable divide between them. The idea of degrees of potency, signified by the two bodies and two worlds, mirrors Schelling's description of life according to *Naturephilosophy*, where organic life is identified as a combination of receptivity-activity. Moreover, the relation between the material and the spiritual bodies is defined by reciprocal determination such that if one stabilizes at a point of minimal potency, the other necessarily rises to a point of maximal potency in order to balance the relation.

#### 4.1 The Magnetic Model and the First Signs of *Identityphilosophy*

It seems that the theme of "original magnetism," presented in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799), persists in Schelling's thinking after its initial formulation. The *Stuttgart Seminars* is one example, as is the earlier work *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801) in which Schelling formulates a *magnetic model* of the Absolute (original identity):

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 + & & + \\
 \underline{A = B} & & \underline{A = B} \\
 A = A
 \end{array}$$

The magnetic model signifies the division of the Absolute (original identity or A=A) into two *distinct* aspects, modalities, or tendencies and their grounding in a common point of

indifference. First, on the top-left portion of the model, there is a preponderance of what Schelling calls the “inward tendency”<sup>250</sup>. I take this to denote a spiritual inclination. Conversely, the top-right portion of the model represents the preponderance of the “outward tendency”<sup>251</sup>. Similarly, I take this to denote an organic or material element. Furthermore, the top-left and right equations show how Nature and Spirit actually contain a portion of the other, albeit in a latent state or at a lower degree of potency. The left-side, for instance, contains a higher degree of the spiritual relative to the material; this is represented by the (+) sign over the “A.” The inverse is true of the right-side, showing a higher degree of the material (+ sign over the B). Schelling’s magnetic model thus represents how Nature and Spirit are in fact *inverted identities* of one another: a single reality divided upon itself, reflecting *its* double-nature.

Drawing on a second Swedenborgian concept<sup>252</sup>, we might say that Schelling’s early philosophies of Nature and transcendental idealism explore and ultimately *show* the *correspondence* of Nature and Spirit<sup>253</sup>. This is manifest in Schelling’s magnetic model. Together the top-left and right tendencies compose the Absolute in manifest form. Grounding the manifestation of the Absolute is original identity (A=A) which pervades and abides the whole of the universe given that Schelling places it under all factors. If we interpret the world as the manifestation of difference, as I did in Chapter I, then the model

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<sup>250</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 368.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell: From Things Heard and Seen*, trans. John C. Ager (West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2009), 73; Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 10-11.

<sup>253</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*, 21. On the same page, McGrath notes that the concept of *correspondences* is ancient and thus predates Swedenborg’s use. McGrath describes *correspondences* as referring “to the macro-micro homology typical of Hermeticism and alchemy, the revived ancient metaphysics in which the universe is assumed to be a complex, hierarchically structured material-spiritual whole within which lower levels image higher levels and seemingly unrelated things resemble or correspond to each other [...]”



shows us that original identity (A=A) is the basis of what Schelling calls, circa 1801, “relative identity” (A=B). In other words, *indifference grounds difference*<sup>254</sup>.

By bringing Nature and Spirit together within a working unity grounded by original identity, Schelling aims to overcome the fundamental ever-present rift between the objective and the subjective, necessarily introduced by the self in order to make self-consciousness and knowledge of Nature possible. However, the point extends further as the goal is to think the difference of Nature and Spirit under the auspices of a single, overarching philosophical perspective, rather than from the eternally disparate vantage points of *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism. Schelling himself affirms this goal in his 1801 treatise when he writes, “For many years I sought to present the one philosophy that I know to be true from two wholly different sides—{both} as philosophy of nature and as transcendental philosophy<sup>255</sup>.” Bringing the two philosophies to bear on one another, Coplestone describes Schelling’s early philosophy in the following way: “The life of representation is Nature’s knowledge of itself; it is the actualization of Nature’s potentiality, whereby slumbering Spirit awakens to consciousness<sup>256</sup>.” A succinct description of Schelling’s early philosophy might be: Nature awakens to itself through Spirit, and Spirit awakens to itself through Nature. The inverted relation hides the grounding identity—the *indifference point*—that links Nature and Spirit and thus connects the philosophy of Nature with the philosophy of Spirit through a philosophy of Identity.

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<sup>254</sup> Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” 367.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 343-44.

<sup>256</sup> Coplestone, *History of Philosophy*, 107.

## 5. Appendix

### A Consideration of Three Differences between Schelling's Philosophy and Hegel's Philosophy

According to Schelling's early philosophy, there are potentially different infinities and different perspectives from which to explore and consider the nature of the Absolute. There is a subjective infinity, as outlined in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800); there is also an objective infinity, as outlined in *Naturephilosophy*, in particular in the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799). Combining these two perspectives we might speculate about the possibility of a subjective-objective infinity in which the two co-appear simultaneously rather than as separate philosophies. To an extent this is how Hegel understands Schelling's philosophy in his treatise *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (1801).

Hegel bases his comparison of Schelling to Fichte primarily on the former's *Presentation of My System of Philosophy* (1801). The main difference between the two, according to Hegel, is that Fichte presents a system grounded on the subjective and constructs what amounts to a form of Subjective Idealism<sup>257</sup>. In contrast, Hegel identifies Schelling's system as grounded in the identity of the subjective Subject-Object and the objective Subject-Object; the former signifies intelligence, consciousness and the ideal while the latter signifies Nature, unconsciousness and the real<sup>258</sup>. In short, Schelling's system is a form idealism that takes its starting point from neither the subjective nor the objective but from their identity, what Schelling calls "the indifference-point"<sup>259</sup>. By the

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<sup>257</sup> Hegel, *Difference*, 175.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>259</sup> Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy," 45.

end of his *Difference* treatise, Hegel comes out in favour of Schelling's approach over Fichte's and in the ensuing years post-1801 constructs his own brand of idealism that comes to be known as Absolute Idealism, claiming not to favour the subjective or the objective at the expense of the other. Although Hegel's idealism works from a similar basis as Schelling presents in his 1801 treatise, there are significant differences between their philosophies. In this appendix, I will explore three of those differences, specifically 1) a difference of logic; 2) a difference concerning reason's access to its ground; and 3) a difference concerning the role of immediacy in knowledge.

As has been demonstrated over the course of this thesis, Schelling's Absolute is neither Nature nor Spirit on its own. Taking stock of both *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism, the subjective and the objective stand over and against one another; this is what makes Schelling's early philosophy fundamentally dualistic. From the vantage point of *Naturephilosophy*, Nature is the positive driving force of *all* becoming; its productivity makes possible all existents culminating with the self and Spirit. Conversely, transcendental idealism posits Nature as a counter power to Spirit through which the latter produces self-consciousness. Although Nature is posited by the self from out of the latter's infinite productivity, it is also the sign of a deeper reality on which both the self and Nature depend: the Absolute which seeks manifestation through Spirit. Generally, Schelling's transcendental idealism can be conceived as a philosophy that attempts to explain Nature in terms of the externalization of Spirit; conversely, *Naturephilosophy* can be conceived as a philosophy that explains Spirit in terms of the internalization of Nature.

In contrast to Schelling, Hegel wants to take the distinction between *Naturephilosophy* and transcendental idealism further by positing a higher philosophy that is the unity (synthesis) of the two. Schelling, adopting a position influenced by Neoplatonism, leaves the distinction and its unresolved tension intact in order not to violate the law of non-contradiction. For Schelling, there is an unresolved dyadic structure in the ground of logic, what S. J. McGrath terms a *Socratic aporia*<sup>260</sup>. The *aporia* produces a disjunction of logical opposites: for example, Nature and Spirit, object and subject, real and ideal. The *aporia* is another feature of Schelling's [early] dualism; its purpose is twofold: 1) to identify logical oppositions, and 2) to produce, even *reveal*, the tension between oppositions, which, in turn, forces a decision. The *aporia* itself stops short of making a decision, leaving the matter to the individual will. On this very point McGrath writes: "Schellingian opposites, the real and the ideal, freedom and necessity, good and evil, the universal and the individual, like a Socratic *aporia*, do not resolve themselves: on the contrary, they create a crisis<sup>261</sup>." By creating a crisis at the heart of the individual, logic sets the stage for decision and action, which are the domains of the will. Just as we saw with Nature and Spirit in Chapters I and II, respectively, the crucial point for Schelling is that true becoming, production and manifestation is something that must be actively *brought forth*.

The consequence of Schelling's logical *aporia* is that complete and total knowledge of the Absolute is not possible; the Absolute cannot be grasped by way of a logical concept. For Schelling then, the temptation to close gaps in our knowledge and

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<sup>260</sup> McGrath, *Dark Ground*, 23-26.

<sup>261</sup> McGrath, "The question concerning metaphysics," 21.

comprehension of the world with concepts insufficient to reality is disrupted. We might say that Schelling's adherence to the inviolability of the laws of logic disrupts "system"—or the temptation to systematization, i.e. strict rational determination—rather than completes it. In contrast to Schelling's maintenance of logical tension and *aporia*, Hegel seeks to overcome and reconcile the tension in a higher unity. From Hegel's perspective, logic does not have to limit itself to the kind of disjunction implied by Schelling's aporetic logic; it can actually move passed the disjunction toward a unity or conjunction of opposites. This is the basis of Hegel's logic of sublation (*Aufheben*). The logical goal then is to push further the quest for a single philosophical principle and system. Hegel concludes that Schelling provides a blueprint for this project but fails to complete it.

Schelling and Hegel's philosophical projects are further differentiated by their respective ideas concerning reason's access to its ground, i.e. reason's own capacity to articulate its principle as well as the nature of the Absolute. This point may be the key difference between the two thinkers as it connects the above point about logic with a third point concerning immediacy, to be discussed below. First, let us consider reason's access to itself (its ground). In essence, the difference comes down to this: for Schelling, reason depends on something other than reason to be, whereas for Hegel, reason depends on itself, on its own negation and affirmation (dialectic). This means that "synthesis" is differently understood by the two thinkers. For Hegel, there is a merging of two elements to create a third that is the synthesis of the two more primitive elements. This third element then initiates a new dialectic at a *higher* or more developed level of being. Thus, every synthesis is a new thesis that produces its own antithesis, which, in turn, produces a new synthesis. In Hegel's own terminology, this development produces the "concrete

universal,” reason’s self-mediated product. The concrete universal combines the best parts of a previous dialectical impasse that pitted a universal category against a particular category. In themselves, these categories cease to be once reason has exercised its inexhaustible capacity to synthesize what first seemed incompatible and incommensurable. Hegel regards this logical sequence as necessary and rational; through it, historical and organic development proceed according to a program guided by reason’s capacity to conceptualize (grasp) *reality* (the real)<sup>262</sup>.

For Schelling, synthesis is an intermediation of two elements that never merge or mix; rather they produce something new by the very fact of their interaction and intermediation. It is as if the two elements are in conversation with one another; it is an event of communion and communication. For Hegel, one gets the sense that if there is a conversation taking place it is one with an image reflected in a mirror. Hegel himself admits this; he writes “An out-and-out Other simply does not exist for Mind<sup>263</sup>.” This passage leaves one with the impression that there is no true outside for the subject (Spirit, Mind) so far as Hegel is concerned. Consequently, everything is taken to be a part of Spirit, part of its *interiority* (for there is no true Other outside it)<sup>264</sup>. This point contrasts with Schelling’s insistence that there is indeed something outside of the subject and outside of reason’s purview. These two differing positions on the interiority and

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<sup>262</sup> McGrath, “the question concerning metaphysics,” 20-21.

<sup>263</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1.

<sup>264</sup> This is not to suggest that for Hegel there are no other subjectivities or persons; Hegel is not a solipsist. Rather, Hegel’s point seems to be that Spirit or Mind (*Geist*) is infinite and as such that which first appears to be Spirit’s negative is ultimately to be understood and grasped as a necessary part of its nature. In short, this *negative* is not other than Spirit but is already a part of its *inner* logic [of self-understanding].

exteriority of reason extend further to Schelling and Hegel's respective ideas on the role of *immediacy* as a condition for the possibility of knowledge.

Drawing on a distinction made by Andrew Bowie<sup>265</sup>, we might say that Hegel seeks "a complete conceptual account of how mind and world relate," whereas Schelling appeals to a "non-conceptual" form of intuition to provide the basis for conceptual knowing<sup>266</sup>. Schelling's emphasis on intuition leads him to posit art as the "organon of philosophy," and the work of art is interpreted as a sign of the necessary, albeit indeterminate, identity between the subjective and the objective. Schelling asserts that this is the case because the work of art is made from out of an unconscious productivity, which is only *transformed*, not *sublated*, by the light of intelligence and conscious productivity. This is not to say that the conscious renders the unconscious conscious, but that the unconscious *as such* receives some manner of expression through conscious productivity. In other words, the work of art is not itself a conceptual product; rather, it is a non-conceptual manifestation of the link between the unconscious and the conscious aspects of the self. As a non-conceptual manifestation, the work of art cannot be reduced or exhausted by conceptual analysis; new and different interpretations always remain possible. As Bowie suggests, the work of art is, therefore, not principally an object of knowledge but a symbol of the primordial relation between object and subject, Nature and Spirit, manifested *in* self-consciousness.

Extending this point further, Schelling's philosophy begins from an *immediate* identity, i.e. that which requires only itself as necessary and sufficient conditions of

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<sup>265</sup> Bowie, *German Philosophy*, 42-50.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

existence<sup>267</sup>. In contrast, Hegel argues that philosophy cannot begin with a predetermined identity, even something determined in and of itself, but must determine each and all of its components and stages of knowing through philosophical analysis; only then can the objects of knowledge be qualified *as such*. This is, in fact, according to Hegel, the sole task of philosophy. In this respect, Hegel argues that philosophy's beginning point, although *apparently* immediate, is, by necessity, always *mediate*, i.e. always a product of dialectical becoming, a process through which the knowing subject seeks itself in ever-higher syntheses of the objective (the real) and the subjective (the ideal or rational). For Hegel, a thing's apparent immediacy is actually arrived at by mediation<sup>268</sup>. We might say that for Hegel the ground of knowledge is rational; it is the law of reason itself. For Schelling, the ground is pre-rational, meaning it precedes reason and is hidden from reason's conceptualizing gaze. The fact that Hegel conceives of *all* knowledge as the product of mediation suggests that if there were an immediate principle or ground prior to mediation it would nonetheless be lifted up and completely absorbed by the process of becoming; its immediacy would be erased *through* becoming. Thus, no "original identity," as articulated by Schelling, is present in Hegel's philosophy. That which may have begun in a state of immediacy is for Hegel unknowable and could only ever be knowable on the condition that it is caught in the dialectical stream of becoming. In contrast, Schelling argues that there must be an original identity, if only through intellectual intuition, and that it shines through the fragmentary state of all things. By following the law of non-contradiction, Schelling maintains a distinction between being

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 48.



and knowledge (thinking) and attempts to explain the connection between the two by way of an intermediation that is necessarily grounded in immediate identity. Hegel, on the other hand, seems to collapse the difference between being and thinking such that the self's (or Subject) rationalization of the real is synonymous with its being. This is why Hegel's philosophy is often referred to as a form of "pan-logicism"; it is also what leads Hegel to conclude, as he does in the *Philosophy of Right*, that the rational *is* the real, implying that the self is *both* Subject and substance of its self-given philosophical task<sup>269</sup>. In other words, the self *is* mediation; what it mediates is itself. A curious reversal thus arises: because Schelling's philosophy is grounded in *the immediate*, i.e. the indeterminate, the self comes to see itself as an ongoing process of manifestation (a kind of mediation) dependent on something other, i.e. original identity. In other words, the self recognizes that its nature will never be fully grasped. In contrast, Hegel's concept of the self appears completely self-sufficient because it has been endowed from the outset with *all* of the powers of mediation; its nature, then, is, at least potentially, immediately at its disposal and the world entirely within its grasp<sup>270</sup>. The only task that remains is to discover it through *analysis*.

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<sup>269</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 10.

<sup>270</sup> McGrath, "the question of metaphysics," 21.

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