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THE SUSPENSION OF REASON IN HEGEL AND SCHELLING

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by

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ABSTRACT

Countering the common depiction of Hegel and Schelling as uncritical champions of reason's triumph in the modern world, I analyze the significance of their respective claims that reason must be "suspended" (*aufgehoben*) in both its theoretical and practical employments. After tracing their uptake of the Kantian distinction between the endless categorizing of the understanding (*Verstand*) and the self-criticism of reason (*Vernunft*), I argue that Hegel and Schelling demonstrate the need for a form of cognition beyond reason. In particular, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Schelling's *Freedom* essay offer alternate spatial models for how reason's infinite striving can be suspended without annulling its advantages over the understanding. These spatial models set the stage for some of the most important debates in twentieth century continental ethics, and careful attention to their structures potentially offers a way around some dialectical impasses concerning the self and the other.

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Introduction

To frame my discussion of reason (*Vernunft*) in the early writings of Schelling and Hegel in terms of its suspension (*Aufheben*)¹ is already to risk a mistranslation. Such a reading not only risks reading their later realization of reason's limitations back into their earlier texts, but even rests on a literal mistranslation. While the difficulty of translating the idealists' term *aufheben* has been widely noted and has spawned such lexical disfigurements as Derrida's *relever* (Derrida 1972 71 ff.) and the English *sublation*, it is perhaps excessively irresponsible to render it with an English word usually used to translate another German term, *aufschieben*. And to magnify the violence, the distinction between the two words is clear even in German proverbial wisdom with the saying "*Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben*"—roughly, "Just because something has been suspended does not mean that it has been cancelled." But a fully adequate translation of *aufheben* is asking too much, as even the German word fails to capture everything Hegel and Schelling mean by it. As Hegel famously notes (H 11: 107), the word can mean both to discard and to raise to a higher level (both of which meanings can also be found in its root's English cognate *heave*). But as the following chapters will show, Hegel means far more by *aufheben* than to discard and raise to a higher level, and a great deal of this added signification is achieved through the dialectic of reason. And although Schelling does not explicitly highlight the two antithetical meanings of *aufheben* (and occasionally even deliberately ignores its connotations of preservation in his less than charitable reading of Hegel [S 10: 137]), he, too, gives it a vital role in his discussion of reason's limitations, assigning it a spatial dimension beyond canceling and preserving.

¹I first encountered this translation in H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf's excellent translation of Hegel's *Differenzschrift*. See, for instance, Harris 1977, 12.

As such, despite its dubiousness, my translation of *aufheben* at least strives to be a virtuous one.² While *suspend* is rarely used in English to refer to an act of lifting, it does signify allowing and encouraging something to persist in its *already* raised state and thus highlights Hegel and Schelling's methodological charge to present distinctions as they first arise in reason (S 3: 331). What Hegel would come to call the dialectic, I will show in Chapter 3, is not so much the active production of distinctions as the process of recalling and organizing distinctions already implicitly known. On the other hand, to suspend is to put off, to take out of action in such a way that what is suspended maintains its force but is not permitted to put this force into effect. Thus the aforementioned proverb intends to say that what has been suspended has not necessarily been annihilated or canceled, but has merely been taken out of action. Undoubtedly, the temporal sense of postponement (*Verschieben* in German) predominates in such uses of *suspension*, but in Chapters 4 through 6 I will show how Hegel and Schelling rethink the *Aufhebung* of reason in spatial terms. By describing the economy of reason's self-overthrowing spatially, they suspend the temporal sense of postponement and raise the spatial sense of preservation to a higher level.

In order to make sense of Hegel and Schelling's suspension of reason, we will need to explore in Chapter 1 how reason emerges as a distinct power of thought in Kant, Fichte, and the earliest Schelling. I do not intend this investigation as a mere background

²While one might at first expect all interpretations of Hegel and Schelling to similarly strive for an adequate translation, it has ceased to be such a central goal for many recent English commentators. On the one hand, it is common in the English Hegel literature not to worry about translating *aufheben* at all, taking it instead as a technical term that can only be defined over the course of dialectical cultivation (Williams 310). On the other hand, David Krell has elected to admit the inherent vice, or even sin, of his interpretations of Schelling and avoid the virtuous project of re-linking reason to the center of Schelling's texts (Krell 1988; Krell 1998).

discussion to review and clarify the conception of reason that Hegel and Schelling will later call into question, but mean for it to show how reason itself founds and guides the movement of suspension. Kant, Schelling, and (more ambivalently) Fichte all identify reason with the free activity of thought in general and thus assign it the power to actively distinguish itself from other, less free elements of cognition—especially the process of analyzing and applying concepts they call the understanding (*Verstand*). By beginning philosophy with reason's reflection on itself, all three hint that reason is to be both the subject and the object of suspension, which occasionally leads in their writings (as in Hegel's) to equivocations not only in grammatical structure, but even regarding the nature and function of reason. Despite the difficulties these equivocations present, we should not close off our discussion of reason by assuming a fixed functional definition and comparing how the German idealists fit this faculty into their systems at various stages in their development. Indeed, we will see in Chapter 1 that (for good reason) even the fastidiously categorical Kant fails to offer a definition of reason. To limit our definition of reason to its role in any faculty epistemology is not to suspend it, but to fail to allow it to distinguish itself as a unique form of striving. The suspension of reason only becomes meaningful when we grant it the freedom to define and redefine itself.

Accordingly, I make no hard distinctions between reason as it is in itself³ and reason as Hegel and Schelling delimit it. The texts I discuss each explore the range of possibilities for reason's relationship to the whole of philosophy, and to this extent none is more correct than the others. After Chapter 1's discussion of reason's emergence as a distinct form of thinking, Chapter 2 traces how Schelling comes to see reason as a form

³And since reason, however we determine it, designates some form of thinking, whether human or otherwise, it is meaningless even to speak of such a thing as "reason in itself."

of organism and the “universal organism” of nature as a manifestation of reason in the three major works of his Nature Philosophy. In Chapter 3 I show how Schelling expands this project in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* to give reason even greater determination, but also how the *System* and Hegel’s essay on *The Difference Between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy* surmise that reason will never come to know itself fully in any system of philosophy. And in Chapter 4 I show how Schelling’s Identity Philosophy seeks to totalize reason by identifying it with the whole of reality. I take this arc from reason’s ascendance in the early texts of German idealism through its increasing complexity in the Nature Philosophy and *System of Transcendental Idealism* to the utterly simple absolute indifference of the Identity Philosophy not as an indication that Hegel and Schelling are growing nearer to the essence of reason, which they finally discover in Hegel’s 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Chapter 5) and Schelling’s 1809 essay on human freedom (Chapter 6), but as a reminder of the various imperatives that reason carries with it as well as the need to suspend these imperatives. To do any less, to treat the moments of reason described before 1807 as “things of the past”⁴ or as meaningful only in light of their subsequent completion would dissolve the distinction between suspending and canceling preserved in our German proverb.

And indeed, it is reason itself that is best equipped to counter such conceptual dissolution. While much has been made of Schelling’s “discovery” of the abyssal character of thought (Ilek 1996) and some commentators have even noted Hegel’s familiarity with this abyss (Nancy 1988, 36), far too little attention has been paid to the location and role of the abyssal in Hegel and Schelling. When Schelling’s early works

⁴As, for instance, Hegel calls art a “thing of the past” in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* (13: 25).

note that our understanding of nature is groundless so long as we seek to analyze it in terms of conditioned conditions (e.g., S 3: 101n), they are (as I show in Chapter 1) merely giving new emphasis to a point Kant and Fichte had already made. And when Hegel's *Phenomenology* shows that desire is abyssal, that there is no basic drive (be it for survival, recognition, or externalization) underlying the infinity of perversions (*Verkehrtheiten*) that human behavior can assume, he is simply restating Schelling's observations on the irreducibility of nature to a single force in the practical sphere—which both he and Schelling saw as fundamentally united with the theoretical. But Hegel and Schelling's insight that reason can suspend these abysses, can suspend us over them, is one that is at best inchoate in Kant and Fichte. As Hegel and Schelling worked from 1795 to 1809 on clarifying how reason suspends the abysses in willing and understanding nature, they came to see this urge for suspension as itself something that needed to be suspended (Chapters 4 through 6). But the fact that reason's project is unfinishable does not imply that it is abyssal. Because talk of abysses always implies the lack of an external ground, descriptions of reason as abyssal miss the point. Hegel and Schelling's central insight is not that reason lacks an adequate ground, but that its striving for unity and postulation of identity must be suspended by something that is both reason and its other. Reason is not only the freedom to suspend drives that have grown perverse, but is itself the origin of perversion and thus must be open to suspension as a whole.

Thus I aim to show neither how Hegel and Schelling develop a common position nor how their views of reason differ. While insights concerning both similarities and differences cannot help but emerge in any study of the two Tübingen roommates, my aim is to show neither their identity nor their difference. Rather, at the center of my

investigations is what Schelling would call the indifference of their positions regarding reason. My focus is not on how Hegel and Schelling encounter one another's works, incorporating certain thoughts and defining themselves negatively against others, but on the common ground of their inquiries in a network of concerns they associate with reason. In other words, the divergences between Hegel and Schelling's philosophies are to be unraveled not as strategic choices based on the differing philosophical commitments of the two thinkers, but as decided in the freedom of reason itself⁵ (cf. Nancy 1988 7).

This attention to their common ground in reason rather than the (often spurious) ways the two try to distinguish their respective systems from each other—such as Hegel's rejection of the role of intellectual intuition in Schelling's philosophy as “the night in which all cows are black” (H 9: 17, ¶16) and Schelling's condemnation of Hegel's system for being a merely negative philosophy unconcerned with reality (S 10: 127)—allows us to go beyond some of the more calcified caricatures that have emerged to mark the distinction between them. In particular, it allows us to avoid labeling Schelling a loopy irrationalist or pseudoscientific charlatan or challenging Hegel's right to a throne atop philosophy that he never really claimed.⁶ Granted, both of these tendencies have been largely discredited in the last half century. In Germany Walter Schulz and Manfred Frank began reading Schelling's inquiries on freedom as the forerunners of modern

⁵Following Hegel and Schelling, I will occasionally use such awkward and tautological expressions to highlight the self-grounding activity of reason and to avoid the reductionistic tendencies of the understanding. But since I will ultimately show that reason (along with its self-grounding and -justifying) is to be suspended, I will mostly forgo the tiresome caveats that such constructions are not to be taken as justifying the tribble-like multiplication of new metaphysical systems.

⁶Cf. *The Indivisible Remainder*, where Žižek argues that Schelling “misses his target and ultimately fights a straw man” in his criticisms of Hegel as an empty absolutist (Žižek 1996, 6).

existentialism, while in the United States Schelling's willingness to question the primacy of reason led him to be taken as a useful counterweight to Hegel. The English-language (and in particular the British) Hegel reception, on the other hand, has done an excellent job of recognizing and exploring Hegel's claims regarding the inherent incompleteness of the project of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Harris 1997; Magnus 2001; Houlgate 2005).

Yet despite all this progress, the importance of reason in guiding Schelling and Hegel's various attempts at systems has not yet been adequately detailed. In their effort to distance him from Hegel, some contemporary readers of Schelling, for instance, mistake Schelling's suspension of reason for its abandonment (Snow 174 ff.; Warnek 166).⁷ And while it is natural for such readers to be somewhat defensive when confronting criticisms of Schelling, given the frequent wholesale rejection of his thinking based on the unsympathetic readings of Hegel and others, this does not justify ignoring the totalizing impulses of his Identity Philosophy or some of the truly misguided tangents in his Nature Philosophy.⁸ Moreover, the fact that Hegel has for most of the past 150 years been seen as more important than Schelling in the history of German idealism does not justify acceding to Schelling's late criticisms of Hegel (S 10: 126 ff.) or reading a closure of philosophy into Hegel's conception of reason. Hegel's calls for faith in the providence or "cunning" (*List*) of reason in his later discussions of history (H 20: 213, ¶209) have done nothing to discourage such simplistic readings, leading too many readers to ignore Hegel's insistence in the *Difference* essay and *Phenomenology* that philosophy must go beyond mere reason. Nevertheless, the suspension of this faith and of reason

⁷In contrast, for an account of the need to preserve reason in our reading of Schelling, see Lawrence 2005 17.

⁸For a particularly egregious example of such turning a blind eye to what is wrongheaded in Schelling's thinking, see Dale Snow's *Schelling and the End of Idealism*.

itself is no more tangential to the movement of Hegel's *Phenomenology* than it is to Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*. The question Schelling and Hegel put before us, I plan to show, is not whether philosophy should or should not be guided by reason, but when and how reason should be suspended.

In keeping with my goal of preserving the possibilities of reason as they appear in the early works of Hegel and Schelling, I have not organized the dissertation strictly thematically, but in accord with the development of the following texts:

Chapter 1: Ascending Reason

- Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, especially the Transcendental Deduction
- Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, Introduction, §49
- Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 (with supplements from the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1797/8)
- Fichte's "On the Basis of Our Belief in the Divine Governance of Things"
- Schelling's *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*
- Schelling's "Treatises Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Wissenschaftslehre*"

Chapter 2: Organic Reason

- Schelling's *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Introduction
- Schelling's *On the World-soul*
- Schelling's *First Projection of a System of Nature Philosophy*

Chapter 3: Speculative Reason

- Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*
- Hegel's *The Difference Between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy*

Chapter 4: The Night of Reason

- Schelling's *Presentation of My System of Philosophy*
- Schelling's *System of Philosophy in General and of the Philosophy of Nature in Particular*, Introduction, Part 1
- Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Absolute Knowing"
- Hegel's *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*, ¶¶257-8

Chapter 5: Suspended Reason

- Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Chapter 5

Chapter 6: Reason on the Periphery

- Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations on the Essence of Human Freedom*

Chapter 1: Ascending Reason

“Our spiritless age trembles before every authentic force which stirs in man.”⁹ (S 1: 157)

As Schelling wrote these words on March 29th, 1795, his age had good reason to tremble. Robespierre’s reign of terror had ended the previous year, and the continent would soon descend into war. The Enlightenment ideals that inspired the French to demand unprecedented dignity on behalf of man were confronted with the groundlessness of the understanding, for they had failed to establish why human dignity was more than a mere nexus of historical forces. Without this ground, Schelling contends, the terror and collapse of the project of liberation were inevitable. Yet in his 1795 essay *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, it was not this abyss, but rather the trembling it provoked that frustrated Schelling. Schelling believed his German-speaking contemporaries had grown so effete and averse to freedom that they could see only a world full of objects and forces, but devoid of free subjectivity. Vertiginous in the face of these abyssal forces, they yoked themselves to the surest heteronomy they could find, canceling their own inner drives for self-understanding and -unification (S 1: 157-8).

In Kant’s critical philosophy, Schelling and Fichte saw an answer to the *Schwärmer* who looked everywhere but in themselves for freedom. Instead of relying on quasi-mechanical Humean laws of association to explain humankind’s cognition of nature, Kant analyzed the mind’s functioning in terms of faculties, theoretical abstractions that explain how the mind in its freedom operates. Yet even these abstractions could not be reconciled with a robust account of human freedom, and thus in

⁹Following Marti’s translation (p. 68), I have adjusted the syntax of a very long sentence.

the 1790s Kant, Fichte and Schelling began to replace the society of faculties hinted at in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* with an account of reason that identified reason with freedom itself. In Kant's three *Critiques*, we see reason emerge from a field of cognitive competitors to gain supremacy among the faculties of the mind. In Fichte's early presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, though reason's centrality as a critical tool is denied, it nevertheless takes its place at the center of all philosophical striving, beginning to determine what it means to think at all. And in the writings of Schelling's so-called Fichtean period, reason comes to be taken as identical with thinking in general. Far from trembling in the face of the forces of human freedom, reason takes inspiration from them, neutralizing them as forces but incorporating them into a greater, self-subsisting whole.

A crucial first step in Kantian critique is distinguishing between two sorts of philosophical objects: those of reason (*Vernunft*) and the understanding (*Verstand*). Whereas *Verstand* seeks to relate objects to their conditions, *Vernunft* seeks only what is unconditioned (A307/B364). Thus the objects most proper to the understanding are Newtonian forces (*Kräfte*), which attempt to account for the totality of the world's motions by abstracting from their causes or conditions by means of continuous mathematical relations. The object most proper to reason, on the other hand, is the will (*Wille*), which gives laws unconditionally and whose operation can be cognized without the mediation of anything external. Since the aim of Kantian critique is to clear away everything uncertain in our knowledge so a firm foundation for metaphysics can be established (A xv), all critique must begin with a critique *of reason*. This genitive is meant both objectively and subjectively: to show that we know with certainty any non-

trivial truth, we must investigate the source of all unconditioned knowledge from this very source. Otherwise, our access to the structure of cognition would be conditioned by something outside of cognition, which would itself require a critique.

Yet in carrying out its own critique, reason is placed in the problematic position of having to assign itself its own limits. The history of metaphysics, according to Kant, is filled with dogmatists who posited beings beyond all the limits of experience (A296/B352). In order to avoid their excesses, reason must judiciously eschew all of these transcendent principles and limit itself to what can be given to it within experience. This, however, as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all noted,¹⁰ implies the troublesome proposition that knowledge begins with reason assuming that it is not the beginning of knowledge. Whereas Fichte would respond to this difficulty by introducing an intellectual intuition that could apprehend that reason is not the beginning of knowledge, Schelling (after 1797) and Hegel would accept reason as the beginning of knowledge and strive to understand how at the same time there must also be something external to reason at the origin of knowledge. Kant, however, never treats this problem explicitly in the first *Critique* and instead offers the division of cognition into sensation, imagination, understanding, and reason as his explanation for the origin of thought. Instead of investigating how thought can move from the unconditioned to the conditioned, he describes a collection of mutually conditioning faculties.

Thus despite the primacy of reason in critique, when Kant investigates the respective powers of the faculties, he relies primarily on processes of the understanding. Even his terminology belies this fact. Kant uses the term *Kraft* (force or power), a type

¹⁰See especially Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (HV 9: 151).

of object supposed to be reserved solely for the understanding, interchangeably with *Vermögen*, his technical term for the mind's various faculties or powers. As investigated in the Transcendental Deduction, a faculty is an abstraction synthesized and analyzed by the understanding in order to account for a particular experience: in this case the production of concepts (A65/B90). What we analyze as faculties do not necessarily represent anything metaphysically real in the mind, but without concepts for them, statements about their limitations—and hence all critique—would be impossible. Kant affirms that he approaches reason through the understanding when he begins his reflection in the Dialectic on “The Pure Employment of Reason” by asking whether we can isolate [*isolieren*] reason as an independent source of concepts or whether it is a “merely subordinate faculty” that gives form to the products of the understanding (A305/B362). Kant's aim is not so much to find the unconditioned unity at the basis of cognition as to investigate the extent to which the faculties can be conditioned by one another. While Kant ultimately grants reason its space as a separate faculty, to the extent that he isolates it as a sort of mental force he gives the understanding exclusive critical access to it.¹¹ At work in the first *Critique*'s description of the unity of the sensible manifold is not the voracious incorporative drive of reason, but the agoraphobic

¹¹We must be careful not to overstate Kant's reliance on the understanding in his analysis of the faculties. While such concepts as *Kraft* predominate in the first *Critique* and the transcendental deduction especially, Kant does not always understand the faculties as forces. Even in the first *Critique*, there are indications that Kant has come to see reason as an organic being—that is, as something self-conditioning. Reason, he states in the “Architectonic of Pure Reason,” “can grow only through internal action (*per intussusceptionem*), not externally (*per appositionem*), just as the body of an animal does not grow by adding members but rather by strengthening each of them and making it better suited to its purpose without any change of proportion” (A833/B861). “Intussusception” is the same word Goethe and Schelling would later use in their accounts of the nutritive instincts of organic nature (See Krell 1998, 80-1).

understanding's urge to categorize. Thus it is unsurprising that in the early sections of the *Transcendental Analytic* the understanding wins out. Since the *Transcendental Deduction* seeks to conceptualize the functioning of cognition, it is only natural for it to trace its unity to the formation of concepts.

Yet later, in the "Regulative Employment of the Ideas," Kant suggests that jurisdiction over the faculties be turned over to reason. As the faculty of unification, reason is compelled to seek the greatest unity possible of the mind's various *Kräfte*. For instance, Kant claims it is the task of reason to determine whether the imagination might be reducible to a combination of other mental forces or "even identical with understanding and reason" (A648-9/B676-7). He does not, however, follow through with unifying the faculties in the first *Critique*. Although the B edition of the *Transcendental Deduction* could be seen as Kant's attempt to incorporate the imagination into the understanding,¹² Kant undertakes no major efforts to show the unity of the faculties in his revision. In the Preface to the second *Critique*, Kant argues that while an account of human cognition must begin with the individual analysis of the faculties, it is incomplete so long as the faculty of reason has not united them into an idea of the whole (K 5: 10). Nevertheless, Kant again defers a unified account of the faculties to another time.

Finally, in the *Critique of Judgment*, we see reason's efforts to unify the faculties. The Introduction deceptively suggests a sort of treaty of Westphalia, with reason acknowledging the rights of understanding to its own territory. Kant reiterates his claim from the first two *Critiques* that the understanding is responsible for the production of all

¹²See, e.g., Beatrice Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge : Sensibility and Discursivity in the Transcendental Analytic of the Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. Charles T. Wolfe, Princeton U. P., 1998, p. 61.

natural or conditioned concepts and reason for the unconditioned concept of freedom (K 5: 176). Yet between these two faculties lies another, the power of judgment, which legislates over no objects and yet nevertheless can be said to have its proper territory (*Boden*), and not just a residence (*Aufenthalt*) (K 5: 177). As the feudal king of the realm of philosophy, the cognitive faculty in general has parceled out territory to both reason and the understanding, and yet for some reason is compelled to grant the unoccupied territory between them to the power of judgment. Judgment is clearly not given this territory to halt its nomadic wandering, for Kant insists that this territory is not a residence. Yet judgment also has no dominion over either nature or freedom, for these belong entirely within the realms of the understanding and reason. Moreover, there is no need for a buffer between the two faculty-lords, for both are able to legislate over the territory of sensible nature in harmony; the concept of freedom does not disturb natural legislation any more than natural concepts disturb free legislation (K 5: 175). And yet, the only field (*Feld*) outside of this territory of two realms (*Gebiete*) is the supersensible, which, while bestowing authority on the cognitive faculties, allows neither of them to govern it. Though reason can populate the frontier of the supersensible with regulative ideas, none of the cognitive faculties can ever settle it.

Still, as the second *Critique*'s postulates of practical reason intimated, Kant goes on to argue that we must think of the territory of sensible nature as within the supersensible's sphere of influence. And in order for this influence to be intelligible, there must be a region of thought that contains neither theoretical nor practical content, which nevertheless can ground the unity of the sensible and supersensible. To show how this unity is possible, Kant places the realms of nature and freedom within a larger

political community, arguing that the faculty of desire stands opposed to the cognitive faculties of reason, the understanding, and judgment (K 5: 197).¹³ The envoy between these faculty kingdoms is pleasure, which can be either a cause or an effect of their unity. In the lower pleasures, the search for pleasure forces desire into consultation with cognition. In contrast, the higher pleasures, such as the quickening (*Belebung*) that accompanies the apprehension of a beautiful object, are produced by a prior unity of desire and cognition. Just as pleasure serves as a mediator between the cognitive and desiring faculties, Kant supposes that judgment contains a ground for the unity of the sensible and supersensible (K 5: 178-9). Or more specifically, judgment must somehow allow for the transition from understanding to reason.

In the realm of natural science, this is to take place as follows: the understanding hands down a few basic laws for the apprehension of nature, such as the nature of forces, that determine all subsequent judgments about nature (K 5: 167). Based upon these transcendental laws of the understanding, determinate judgments subsume particulars under universals in a rigid, mechanical fashion. But since nature's forms vastly outnumber the forms produced by the pure understanding, in order for science to be possible there must also be judgments that subsume particulars under universals accessible to, but not necessitated by, the human understanding (K 5: 168). Although such reflective judgments appear contingent to our understanding, if they correspond to natural laws, they must be necessary "in virtue of a principle, unknown to us, of the unity of the manifold" (K 5: 180). Thus the task of a critique of reflective judgment is to show

¹³Here, as in the table at the end of the Introduction (K 5: 198), Kant leaves out the power of imagination, with no explanation why he no longer includes it among the cognitive faculties.

how we can perceive the unity of the sensible manifold *as if* it were legislated by an understanding to which we have no *a priori* access. (We cannot have access to this understanding, for otherwise the judgment would be determinate.) The cognition of the sensible manifold is thus disunited at the level of the human understanding and requires us to postulate a superhuman understanding to make this unity intelligible. But what faculty is qualified to postulate the purposiveness of nature assumed in this superhuman understanding? In the first *Critique*, only reason is capable of producing regulative ideas that, while not telling us anything positive about the world, govern its intelligibility. But here in the third *Critique*, Kant claims that the purposiveness of nature is a *concept* produced by judgment. Like the concepts of the understanding, the judgment of nature's purposiveness requires no reflection and arises as if mechanically in the course of experience (and not by the free positing of a supersensible reason). But Kant emphasizes that this concept does not determine how we *actually* judge, but how we *ought to* judge (K 5: 182). In order to make our statements about the empirical world sensible, we *ought to* judge nature purposive.

Yet this is a strange sort of ought, as it lacks the freedom associated with laws of practical reason. The power of judgment is compelled to suppose a harmony of nature with the human understanding, but the extent of this harmony is left open-ended (K 5: 188). Kant does not see this as a flaw, because his goal is not to show when the faculty of judgment should and should not be employed, but how this faculty is so constituted as to allow reason to incorporate the understanding into itself. Reason's proposed treaty at the beginning of the Introduction is thus disingenuous. What appears to be a cession of territory and demarcation of its own boundaries actually blurs its boundaries, suggesting

the potential need for abandoning or suspending what Kant in the first *Critique* called the discipline of reason (A707/B735 ff.). It seems that from 1781 to 1790 Kant has shifted from opposing a tyranny of reason so far as possible to sufficiently fearing a power vacuum among the faculties to promise reason indeterminate power.

Providing perhaps the strongest evidence of this new conservatism are Kant's efforts to bring the imagination under the shadow of criticism. Just as we saw with the understanding, the Introduction to the *Third Critique* initially suggests an autonomy of the imagination. Although the table of cognitive faculties at the end of the Introduction lists only the understanding, reason, and judgment, at other points Kant clearly designates the imagination as a cognitive faculty in its own right (e.g., K 5: 191; K 5: 314). The grounds for this ambivalence can be traced back to the first *Critique*, where Kant strives both to understand the imagination as one force among others and to reduce it to a unified cognitive faculty. Using Kant's earlier terminology, we can say that the *territory* of the imagination is in doubt; but when reflected on by the understanding, this is the same as saying that the *force* of imagination, the *Einbildungskraft*, *die Kraft der Einbildung*, is in doubt. Of Gasché and Sallis's claims that Kant's power of imagination twists free of a conscious subjectivity there can be no doubt (Gasché 35; Sallis 2000, 144). Since the imagination underlies the very possibility of a transcendental unity of apperception, it must not only absolutely precede subjectivity, but escape it, disrupting any attempts by the will to gain complete dominion over consciousness. But there *must be* doubt over whether imagination also twists free of *reason*. True, the imagination solicits a kind of free play antithetical to the determinate autonomy that Kant envisions practical reason to be. But if it is reason's task to come to terms with all the powers of mind (as Kant claims

in the “Regulative Employment of the Ideas”), then the imagination as such belongs in reason’s jurisdiction despite reason’s lack of executive power over it. If, then, the structure of practical reason traced out especially in the first two critiques proves inadequate to pronouncing and enforcing judgments over the imagination, reason’s response in the third *Critique* is not to accept this inadequacy, but to expand itself to meet the challenges of effective criticism.

The locus in which reason attempts this reincorporation is the figure of the genius. In the most sustained investigation of the interrelation of the faculties of any of the three *Critiques*, Kant seeks to show how even something as seemingly irrational as artistic genius is indeed accessible, if not reproducible, by reason. In order to explain the production of free works of art by an individual whose actions must be entirely empirically explicable, Kant suggests that the genius is able to tap into the purposiveness (*Zweckmässigkeit*) of nature without imposing her own purposes (*Zwecke*) on the artwork. That is, although the production of the artwork can be explained by the artist’s empirical psychology, nevertheless the formal purposiveness of the artwork shows that genius can only actualize itself through nature’s free purposiveness working through the artist. Genius thus serves as a model for how apparently pre-rational sensibility can be drawn into the imagination and subsequently into reason. Just as judgment supposes nature to follow a purposiveness compatible with the understanding and hence with reason, genius gives imagination the power of “creating another nature, as it were, out of the material that nature actually gives it” (K 5: 314). Instead of meeting the gift of nature

with reflective gratitude, reason returns it to the retailer in exchange for a more rational version.¹⁴

Unlike with the first nature, we need not postulate a possible accord between this second nature and reason, for the existence of such an accord accompanies the very possibility of genius. In the Analytic of Aesthetic Judgement's section "On the Faculties (*Vermögen*) of the Mind (*Gemüt*) Which Constitute Genius" (§49), Kant considers those cases in which "certain products that are expected to reveal themselves at least in part as fine art (*schöne Kunst*)" and are completely in accord with good taste nevertheless are completely without spirit (*ohne Geist*) (K 5: 313). Poems, orations, and, yes, even women can have everything requisite to be a beautiful object and yet lack spirit. "Spirit in an aesthetic sense," Kant explains, "is the animating principle in the mind [*das belebende Prinzip im Gemüt*]" (K 5: 313). The word translated here as "animating" is *belebende*, the same word Kant uses in describing the way a beautiful object stimulates the imagination and understanding into an active and free play (K 5: 219). Thus spirit is the principle that makes an art object animated and ultimately what allows the observer to judge it as beautiful. This principle, Kant maintains, "is nothing but the power [*Vermögen*] of exhibiting aesthetic ideas" (K 5: 313-4). By "aesthetic idea," Kant means

¹⁴In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze criticizes the German idealists' conception of a second nature as a false form of repetition (Deleuze 4). In place of an empiricism that treats each new appearance as a gift, conscience seeks to draw these appearances back into an economy of exchange, replacing the infinite generativity of nature with the predictability of the moral order. But for both Schelling and Hegel, the appeal to the second nature far more than a reflexive demand for order. In Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, this second nature will reappear as reason's effort to come to terms with the abyssal quality of individual desires through the establishment of human law, which, in turn, is submitted to (and hence suspended by) the genius's creativity (S 3: 596). And in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel will describe the impossibility of identifying the first and second natures as the inherent perversity of reason in the public order (H 9: 206, ¶377).

“a representation (*Vorstellung*) of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e. no *concept*, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it” (K 5: 314). Thus an aesthetic idea is the converse of a rational one: whereas a rational idea is a concept to which no intuition can be adequate, an aesthetic idea is a representation to which no concept can be adequate. An object’s spirit (in the aesthetic sense) is thus its ability to evoke representations which playfully resist conceptualization and stimulate the cognitive faculties.

This stimulation, Kant elaborates, is more complex than the free play of imagination and understanding that he had alluded to earlier. The imagination has the ability to restructure (*umbilden*) experience when it finds it too tedious, and it does so through more than the laws of analogy introduced in the first *Critique* (B218ff.). When the imagination reworks experience, it is no longer bound to the determined laws of cognitive functioning, but freely employs reason to produce representations that surpass (*übertreffen*) nature (K 5: 314). These representations surpass nature in the dual sense that they are underdetermined by the cognitive laws of the mind, but also produce an intuition of freedom working in and through nature. When an object produces a representation that belongs to a concept in such a way that it infinitely exceeds it, the representation sets the power of reason into motion, stimulating it to freely explore its freedom (K 5: 414-5). The very idea of the supersensible can give rise to such a quickening, provided that it is attached to a sensible expression. One finds in poetry, for instance, the invocation of the infinite in certain finite representations which could not possibly capture the infinite (K 5: 316). While all human beings are capable of

appreciating the incomprehensibility of aesthetic spirit, the genius holds the privileged position of being the locus of freedom's exceeding of nature. More specifically, it is the *imagination* of the genius that serves as the locus for this excess. For it is the imagination that both finds aesthetic ideas that can play off of determinate concepts and strives to find adequate expression (*Ausdruck*) for the mental attunement (*Gemütsstimmung*) that these ideas produce (K 5: 317).

Yet Kant conceives of the imagination's excess not as a force that exceeds nature, but as spirit's placing itself beyond nature. What is *inspiring* about works of genius for Kant is not their abyssal soul-searching for the grounds of possibility of an attunement of the faculties, but the spirit's ability to exceed an understanding which seeks to reduce all reality to conditioned forces of nature. Reason thus compels us not to be caught up in the force of imagination, but instead to enlist the imagination for the purposes of reason. Through this enlistment of the genius, reason subjugates an abyssal understanding that sees in its world nothing but conditioned conditions and grants itself rights to the territory of all faculties. This new, expansive reason that comes to the fore in the third *Critique* may prove abyssal—and indeed, I think Schelling's *Freiheitschrift* proves exactly this—but it does not plunge into an abyss of forces.

Likewise, while Fichte presents a more manifold account of reason than he is often given credit for, he also manages to keep reason insulated from the abyss of the understanding. Given Fichte's overarching vision of a reason certain of its own freedom, we might expect his affirmations of the supremacy of reason in human thought to be less ambiguous than Kant's. But though Fichte never wavered from the claim that human

cognition consists in reason setting an external world against a self-positing I (*Ich*) only to reincorporate it into the I, there is considerable variety in his early claims about the nature of reason and its place in cognition. This ambivalence, I suggest, arises from his interpretation of reason as a striving rather than a Kantian faculty. Throughout the early versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*,¹⁵ Fichte describes reason as constantly striving to overcome opposition and disunity. Yet in the early *Wissenschaftslehren*, knowledge does not emerge from an *unvordenkbares* striving, but instead begins with a decisive act of abstraction. Thus reason holds the tenuous position of guiding philosophy while remaining distinct from its origin—an origin that Fichte nevertheless takes to be of great importance. Fichte’s dual emphasis on the beginnings of philosophical thought and the striving that guides it fails to award reason the unifying force that we later see in Schelling and Hegel.

While there are important systematic differences in the various presentations of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, we can see Fichte’s ambivalence toward reason throughout his early writings. Given that (as Fichte takes Kant to have shown) in all experience subject and object (or, in the words of the 1794 *Wissenschaftshlehre*, the intelligence [*Intelligenz*])

¹⁵I use Fichte’s German instead of Heath and Lachs’s “Science of Knowledge” not because I find problems with this translation, but because recent scholarship has taken to referring to Fichte’s philosophy either as “The *Wissenschaftslehre*” or as “The Doctrine of Science.” While *Wissenschaftslehre* literally means “doctrine of science” and not “science of knowledge,” I see nothing gained in using the former rather than the latter. Fichte intends “*Wissenschaftslehre*” to refer to the project of philosophy as a whole, and he uses this neologism rather than “philosophy” merely to avoid denying the title “philosopher” to those who do not follow his principles. In Fichte’s language, a *Wissenschaftslehre* is simply an effort to ground knowledge. Indeed, the meaning of “*Wissenschaftslehre*” is so undetermined for Fichte that we could almost translate its two roots into the Greek *episteme* and *logos* and then transliterate these back into the English “epistemology” without losing anything from the general and underdetermined sense that Fichte gives it.

and the thing [*Ding*]) are identical, there are only two ways to find a ground for experience outside of experience itself: we can abstract either from the intelligence or from the thing (F 1: 425). If a philosopher abstracts away the thing, then he is left with a pure act of intelligence to ground all experience and is thus an idealist. If he abstracts away from the intelligence, he is left with a thing-in-itself, which must somehow be the ground for both intelligence and its own unity with intelligence, a position that Fichte calls dogmatism. Since only a free intelligence (and not a dead thing in itself) can engage in the abstraction, idealism is the only intelligible philosophical system. In asserting that idealism and dogmatism are the only two possible systems, Fichte assumes philosophy must begin with a distinct act or judgement in order to be systematic. Though idealism's abstraction from the thing does not produce the intelligence and is thus "natural to man" (F 1: 426), it is nevertheless a genuine beginning in the sense that it is dependent upon nothing other than itself. Moreover, it must be a discrete, determinate action, for otherwise the system would try to deduce determinate representations from something indeterminate (F 1: 440). Thus in contrast to dialectical philosophy (which I will explore in Chapter 3), the *Wissenschaftslehre* holds that a system cannot be founded on the primordial undeveloped drive to system, but instead results from an act independent of any reason.

This results, as Fichte admits in the introduction to the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, in a subordination of reason to freedom. In deciding whether to begin with the dogmatic or idealistic abstraction, "Reason makes possible no principle of decision; for we deal here not with the addition of a link in the chain of reasoning, which is all that rational grounds extend to, but with the whole chain, which, as an absolutely primary act, depends

solely on the freedom of thought” (F 1: 432-3). In the 1797-8 *Wissenschaftslehre* (possibly following Schelling), Fichte will call this absolutely free act of thought “intellectual intuition [*intellektuelle Anschauung*],”¹⁶ and since it does not use concepts to arrive at its knowledge of the self, it cannot be rational (F 1: 463). Intellectual intuition, as an absolutely free choice, is governed not by reasons but by “inclination and interest [*Neigung und Interesse*]” (F 1: 433), so those who enact this intuition and those who do not must differ in their interests. Yet since all interest must inevitably be some form of self-interest, the dogmatist and idealist’s interests can differ only in form rather than content. Whereas the idealist places the highest value on his own freedom, the dogmatist can only find himself in objects outside of himself and thus feels threatened whenever the primacy of such objects are called into question. The dogmatist is by disposition unable to see that by making his existence dependent upon things other than himself, he gives himself over to them and forfeits the autonomy that is his right as a conscious being.

Yet though the true system begins with the idealist’s free renunciation of all dogmatism, “one reaches idealism, if not through dogmatism itself, at least through the inclination thereto” (F 1: 434). Thus the idealist’s and dogmatist’s interests and inclinations cannot be irremediably different, and there must be some ground for someone to give up his inclinations to dogmatism in favor of the inclination to idealism: namely, the failure of dogmatism to show what it assumes, the unity of the thing-in-itself and consciousness. Yet Fichte insists that this ground is to be given by the system as a whole, not through reason. The insufficiency of dogmatism cannot be proved through

¹⁶Recognizing that Kant had denied the possibility of an intellectual intuition, Fichte clarifies that it is not some sort of extrasensory intuition into the thing in itself, but is nothing but action (F 1: 472). It is the sort of cognition that allows one to be aware of the categorical imperative.

concepts, but only through the demonstration that idealism can account for the whole of experience. Still, the choice of idealism over dogmatism appears in Fichte's description to be (in some yet-to-be determined way) a rational one, thus setting the terms for Schelling's later incorporation of reason into dialectics. For both Hegel and the Schelling of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, reason governs the choice of a coherent line of thinking over an incoherent one.

This different attitude toward reason is not merely the result of different terminology. That is, Fichte does not have a lower opinion of reason than Hegel and Schelling just because he holds a narrow definition of reason that excludes the possibility of its being governed by what Kant would call pathological inclination. Rather, the difference arises from Fichte's more rigid conception of the identity of I and not-I. For him, the I is opposed to the not-I in such a way that whatever belongs to the I cannot belong to the not-I and vice-versa. Though he, like Schelling and Hegel, links reason with subjectivity's striving for self-identity, he fails to conceive of the I and not-I as products of reason, insisting that identity is grounded not in an unprethinkable striving, but instead a discrete, conscious act of an I. Since he does not see the not-I as already rational even in preceding any conscious act of the I, the only way for him to reconcile the co-presence of self and not-self is to recognize that they *limit* (*einschränken*) each other (F 1: 108). Thus the I consists of divisible (*teilbar*) I and divisible not-I, whose unity consists not in reason's self-enactment, but in the I's act of positing the divisible not-I in the divisible I.¹⁷

¹⁷Fichte seems to side with Schelling and Hegel, however, when, in the *Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre* he argues that intellectual intuition can no more

Yet even given this valuing of freedom over reason, Fichte does not subordinate reason to the whims of the individual. He is quite insistent that those who misapprehend the nature of their selves are weak not only in powers of thinking (*Denkkraft*), but in character:

Their I, in the sense in which they take the word, that is, their individual person, is the ultimate goal of their action, and so also the boundary of their intelligible [*deutlichen*] thought. To them it is the one true substance, and reason a mere accident thereof. Their person does not exist as a specific expression of reason; on the contrary, reason exists to help this person get along in the world, and if only the latter could get along equally well in its absence, we could do without reason altogether, and there would then be no reason at all. (F 1: 505)

Here Fichte implies that reason is central in deciding for idealism over realism. This could be taken as a change of position between the 1794 *Fundamental Principles of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* and the 1797 *Second Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre (For Readers Who Already Have a Philosophical System)*, wherein Fichte ceased to see reason as external to the free I and came to the Kantian position that reason is constitutive of free subjectivity. But a reflection on Fichte's account of the distinction between theoretical and practical reason allows us to avoid positing any such change of opinion. In the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte argues that a complete account of subjectivity requires us both to conceive how the not-I gives rise to the I and to produce the not I from out of the I. The first is an act of theoretical philosophy, whereby the I posits its own positedness in order to grasp freedom as its condition of possibility, and the second is a practical act of the will, whereby the I reaffirms its own primacy over the not-I. While knowledge begins with the *act* of positing the I in opposition to the not-I and thus is

appear in isolation than sensible intuition, "for both must be brought under concepts" (F 1, 464). Thus reason must have some sort of dominion over even intellectual intuition.

essentially practical, our philosophical reflection on this knowledge must begin as a theoretical investigation and only later become practical (F 1: 126). Theoretical reason is in some sense ontologically dependent on freedom (i.e., practical reason), and thus we ought never to subordinate our freedom to any product of theoretical reason. But at the same time, Fichte can criticize those who value themselves over reason because practical reason is identical with the freedom that makes possible the production of the I.

This line of thought can also be explained with Fichte's product/process distinction. Just as the active self stands against the resisting and passive non-self, the cause (*Ursache*—literally, primordial thing) stands against its product (F 1: 136). It is only the unity of the two, which Fichte calls the process, that is truly alive and free. Both those who value their own selves over the free activity of reason and those who value the dead products of a theoretical reason¹⁸ withdrawn from the world over their own free activity choose product over process, and it is this inclination that Fichte claims his detractors are unable to overcome. This distinction between dead products and living process prefigures the distinction between the understanding and reason on which Schelling and Hegel will place such importance. Fichte acknowledges that what drives philosophical insight can be neither an inorganic force nor a mechanism for abstraction, but is the free life of reason itself.

Still, the distinction between reason and the understanding remains largely inchoate in Fichte's writings. For example, in "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World" (1798), the work that gave rise to the famous Atheism Controversy, Fichte asserts that since it assumes the existence of a world to whose

¹⁸Both Schelling and Hegel would use "understanding" here instead of "reason."

ground we have no access, the cosmological proof for the existence of God is “an inference that can never be drawn by the original understanding, which stands under the tutelage of reason and is guided by its operation” (F 5: 179). Now if there is such a thing as an “original understanding” guided by reason, then reason must be at the ground of all understanding, with all understanding that is not guided by reason standing as the errant emanation of original understanding. Mere understanding would not be more primitive than reason, but merely its misuse.¹⁹

Fichte’s distinction between the standpoints of natural science and transcendental philosophy also fails to mark a distinction between a merely schematic understanding and a reason identical with the life of philosophy. In the standpoint of natural science, “reason is required to stick with the being of the world itself, a being that is treated as something absolute” (F 5: 179). Under this form of reason, “it is complete nonsense to offer an explanation of the world and of its forms in terms of the goals or purposes of any intelligence” (F 5: 180). The standpoint of natural science is thus hostile to any line of thinking that assumes, like Kant in the third *Critique*, that nature must exhibit a purposiveness. While transcendental philosophy shows no such hostility, neither does it see the world as developing in accord with the guidance of reason. Rather, it makes reason its tool for forming concepts about the being of the world. Since Fichte’s transcendental philosophy sees itself as merely a standpoint (and not reason’s own development), it marks a distinction between itself and reason that Hegel and Schelling

¹⁹This stands in contrast to the early writings of Hegel and Schelling, which take reason to be more organically complete than the understanding. In *On the World-soul* and the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, for instance, Schelling shows how the primitive understanding develops into reason, whereas Hegel’s *Differenzschrift* and Schelling’s Identity Philosophy trace how reason *devolves* into the understanding.

overcome. In Hegel and Schelling, reason (unlike the understanding) is never confined to a particular standpoint and certainly cannot assume that the world exists absolutely external to it. Reason is precisely that which recognizes itself and its purposes everywhere in the world. This is in a way Fichte's position as well, since he does not believe the standpoint of natural science to be adequately grounded, but the point is that the Fichtean writings from which Schelling and Hegel set out have not yet marked reason as having its own absolutely free purposiveness, limited neither by a particular standpoint nor by a subjectivity's desire to understand the world.²⁰

By his 1800-1801 announcement of a new presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte clarifies his position on the place of reason in philosophy: "Philosophy, accordingly, would be the cognition of reason itself by means of reason itself—through intuition" (F 7: 159). Reason is at the center of all philosophical reflection, but intuition is what makes this striving possible. Fichte thus agrees with Kant that transcendental philosophy involves the reflection of reason upon its own limits, but he adds the additional claim that this reflection is not the basic capacity of reason, but instead involves the mediation of a faculty able to intuit self-evident truths. If the primary task of philosophy is to form concepts about the formation of concepts, then we must also find intuitions to correspond to these concepts, for otherwise they are nothing but empty wordplay. In striving to understand our own freedom, philosophers seek not only to conceive that we are free, but to intuit this freedom as actual. Without such intuitions,

²⁰In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel makes this one of his two overriding criticisms of Fichte's philosophy. "Fichte," Hegel states, "does not attain to the idea of reason as the perfected, real unity of subject and object, or of I and not-I" (H 9: 161). His other complaint is that Fichte grounds subjectivity not in the absolute, but in a concrete self-consciousness.

not only is our knowledge merely formal, but it fails to account for the origins of concepts in the first place. I cannot know myself until I know what there was before I conceived of myself (F 7: 157). Though Fichte had considered the intuition's subordination to reason as early as 1794 (F 1: 229), he now announces plans to formalize the relation. (Intellectual) intuition is to be the philosopher's tool for allowing reason to come to know itself. Unfortunately, the new presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre* here announced fell victim to the turmoil of Fichte's professional life and never appeared in the form Fichte planned. Although Fichte's early attempts at presenting the *Wissenschaftslehre* laid the grounds for the ascension of reason in Schelling and Hegel, these works failed to place reason as the single unifying source of philosophy.

While he was thirteen years younger and is often thought of as Fichte's disciple and successor, Schelling began publishing at roughly the same time as his mentor. His first work, *On the Possibility of a Form of Philosophy in General*, appeared in 1794, the same year that Fichte's first version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* began circulating. Indeed, the timing of their works often made them seem more like collaborators or even competitors than teacher and student. Several times over the next decade Schelling would accelerate his own work, including his 1796 *New Deduction of Natural Right* and 1797 "Treatises Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Wissenschaftslehre*," to publish before Fichte could present similar projects. In all of these cases, Schelling need not have worried about Fichte reaching the same conclusions first. Though he was only eighteen when he first encountered Fichte during the latter's visit in 1793 to the seminary at Tübingen, Schelling soon began developing a position that, while indebted to Fichte,

showed important differences from the rudimentary version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* to which he had been exposed.²¹ Schelling did not begin working regularly with Fichte until he accepted a post in Jena in 1798. In the time preceding this move, Schelling published several works, including the 1795 *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy, or On the Unconditioned in Human Knowledge*, that more or less recounted the works of Fichte enthusiastically.²² *Of the I* does, however, mark Schelling's first indication (other than in his unpublished 1794 essay on the *Timaeus*) that the unity of self-consciousness cannot exist in a subject or concrete act, but must precede self-positing (S 1: 166). Schelling calls the Fichtean project into question by declaring that "the I is no longer the pure, absolute I once it occurs in consciousness" (S 1: 180). Indeed, basing our epistemological inquiries on the presumption of a conscious subject, which Schelling dubs "transcendental reflection," is for him the failing of all modern metaphysics (see Pfau 26).

As its subtitle suggests, the goal of *Of the I* is to find the unconditioned origin of all conditioned knowledge. Unlike Fichte in the (First) *Introduction to the Wissenschaftslehre*, for instance, Schelling does not begin with self-positing, but instead with the claim that knowledge can only be real if it is grounded in itself and nothing else. Any knowledge that is reached only through other knowledge is conditioned by that knowledge, and thus unstable unless tied to firm, self-certain knowledge. In order for the ground of all knowledge to be absolutely firm, it must not only be unconditioned, but

²¹ Fichte's adoption of the name "idealism" for his system may have been an effort to distinguish his own project from the criticism expounded in Schelling's 1795 *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* (Breazeale xxvi).

²² When he published the first volume of his collected works in 1809, Schelling wrote of "Of the I" that "It shows idealism in its freshest form, in a sense which it may have lost later" (S 1: 159).

unconditionable (S 1: 164). But this could only be the case if unconditioned knowledge created itself in its very thought, if it were being itself (S 1: 163). Largely repeating Fichte's argument from the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* (and playing on the etymology of *unbedingt*), Schelling argues that such self-creating thought can only belong to an I, and never to a thing (*Ding*). But Schelling makes the point (one that was at best undeveloped in Fichte's work to that point) that this I is not only distinct from (self-)consciousness, but disappears as soon as it enters consciousness, for consciousness must be conditioned by the absolute spontaneity that makes it possible (S 1: 180). "Attend to yourself" (F 1: 422) is thus an inadequate suggestion for those seeking to think the unconditioned. The founding thought of all philosophy must be the freedom that makes such attentiveness possible.

But it is not enough simply to think the unconditioned as the condition of possibility of consciousness, for such thinking attempts to condition the unconditioned through the experience of thinking. Because Kant makes our epistemological access to the unconditioned a philosophical object, Schelling argues that this focus on conditions of possibility prevented him from thinking the absolute. Whereas Kant strove to formulate concepts for that which makes conceptualization possible, the unconditioned cannot be reached by mediation of concepts, but only by intellectual intuition. Kant's denial of the possibility of any non-sensual intuition (*KrV* B307) allows him only to presuppose the absolute in his analyses of freedom and prevents him from seeing what the I is in its essence. Since thinking is for Kant always a sort of determining, that which is undetermined—namely, freedom or the absolute—cannot be thought. That which makes all determination possible is only a limit concept. And limit concepts, though useful in

preventing thought from assuming its merely speculative knowledge is universally valid, are ultimately unsatisfying, since all knowledge demands not just to regulate, but to become actual through a firm, verifiable relationship to experience (S 1: 162).

Moreover, although the I is not determined by my conscious experience or anything else, there must be some reason for calling it the I rather than simply the absolute. As Descartes had shown, the I is that which produces itself unconditionally, that whose very thought includes its own being. It is not divisible (for then its oneness or multiplicity would be conditioned) or able to stand alongside another I, but is identity, $A=A$, pure and simple (S 1: 178). Even Kant's moral law, since it is mediated by concepts, is too heteronomous for the I. In order to will the morally good, I have to align myself with limitations determined by something other than myself. Willing the morally good is not identical with willing oneself, for the good appears either as a concept or as a mere temporal moment of oneself. If in willing the good I will a universal(izable) maxim, then my self-willing derives from an external necessity of consistency in maxims. If, on the other hand, one advanced a more controversial interpretation of Kant according to which each instance of willing the moral law were nothing but willing one's own willing, then this willing would still be conditioned by the temporal act of willing. In willing my own willing, I am not willing myself absolutely, but willing determinate instances of willing (S 1: 196-7). Because of this inability to identify willing the morally good with willing oneself, Kant is forced to distinguish between morality and happiness. The only way to overcome this separation is to postulate their ultimate identity, which, in turn, is to be insured by the "Supreme Reason that governs according to moral rules He likewise posited as underlying nature as its cause" (*KrV* A810/B838). And of course, no

postulate can be an adequate expression of the absolute, since the very act of postulating assumes its own finitude.

Spinoza, who made no distinction between happiness and the good, or even between being and willing (*conatus*), thus advanced a far more tenable ethics than many give him credit for. Those who claim that Spinoza's system "eliminates all notions of a free though law-determined wisdom" are fixated on a lower plane of ethical thought at which individual wills stand opposed to one another, and they thus fail to realize that the pure identification of nature and power is the ultimate expression of freedom (S 1: 196).²³ Freedom limited by individuality is not freedom in its essence, but only the expression of inhibited freedom. True freedom strives to overcome all inhibitions, including that of individuality.²⁴ Since happiness is always the goal of an individual as individual, "Therefore we must strive infinitely not to *become* happy, but no longer to need happiness, indeed to become *incapable* of needing it, and to elevate our very being to a form that renounces the form of happiness as well as that of its opposite" (S 1: 198). While this may seem like a form of self-denial, it is only a denial of the self as limitation. Viewed positively, it is an expression of the I's absolute freedom and power to be.

²³Schelling conveniently ignores the fact that most of Spinoza's ethical claims in Parts Three and Four of the *Ethics* apply not to substance as a whole, but to individual bodies. To ground these propositions, the lemmata in Part Two (unsuccessfully) seek to show how an infinite substance can be divided into individual bodies that have their own *conatus*. (A body is an individual if its parts remain in close spatial proximity and maintain a constant proportion of motion and rest to one another.) If Parts Three and Four represent the core of Spinoza's ethics, then Spinoza is just as guilty as Schelling's contemporaries of limiting freedom to individuals.

²⁴In a move whose significance will be more apparent when I turn to the *Freedom* essay, Schelling calls that which unifies a finite self 'personality' (S 1: 200). Personality, in contrast to the infinite scope of the I, seeks to ensure finitude while insisting on a unity of one's conscious experiences. Thus, since the moral impulse of the finite self is to move away from finitude, "the ultimate goal of all striving can also be represented as an expansion of personality to infinity, that is, as its own destruction" (S 1: 200).

Though a renunciation of all self-denial, Schelling's ethical ideal is nothing so little as egoism. Thinking the I's absolute freedom and power entails gratitude rather than arrogance. For

Only when we think about such a harmony [between striving and its objects] in its relation to *our entire* activity (which, from its lowest to its highest degree, aims at nothing else but the harmony of the not-I with the I) can we regard a contingent harmony as a *favor* [*Begünstigung*] (not a reward [*Belohnung*]), as a voluntary accommodation [*Entgegenkommen*] on the part of nature, as an *unexpected* assistance [*unerwartete Unterstützung*] which nature bestows on the whole of our activity (not merely our moral acts). (S 1: 198n)

If we are properly attuned to this gift of nature, we see that what the finite I conceives of as moral law is in reality the natural law of the infinite²⁵ I (S 1: 198). But since the moral law is a finite expression of the infinite natural law, it aims at turning its own laws (which Kant called laws of freedom) into laws of nature.

But if all moral striving occurs internal to the I rather than as freedom's striving to externalize itself in nature, then Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason must be reconceived. There can be no such thing as a practical reason by which freedom produces determinations in external nature, nor can there be a theoretical apprehension of a nature wholly external to the I. If the use of reason presupposes the identity of I and nature, then any attempt to unite the two through reason is a non-starter. Nevertheless, there is an immanent sense in which reason strives for unity, by which the

²⁵To mark the Hegelian distinction between the bad and good infinities, Marti renders *unendlich* sometimes as 'infinite' (bad infinite) and sometimes (as he does here) as 'non-finite' (good infinite), depending on which meaning Schelling intends. Even though Schelling did not arrive at what came to be known as the Hegelian conception of good infinity as negation of negation until five years after the publication of *On the I*, I agree that Schelling is using the term here in the sense of the good infinite. Nevertheless, I have chosen to stick with Schelling's original lack of explicit differentiation between the two.

finite I strives to make itself identical with the infinite. We can thus preserve some of the sense of Kant's practical reason by replacing freedom in the subject place with a finite I: it is not freedom that strives to externalize itself in nature, but the finite I that strives to unify itself with infinite nature. It is more difficult, however, to make sense of theoretical reason, for the first principle of philosophy (the I as unconditioned) rules out the possibility of any real knowledge of externality. If the I posits itself theoretically as identical to all reality, then there is nothing opposed to the I, which makes the very proposition of such identity meaningless. Idealism is thus possible only "as a practical regulative" (S 1: 210), as the commitment to identifying oneself with all reality.

If we give the name reason to this striving for identity, reason has the robust practical task of bringing finite thought to the unconditioned and at best an only trivial theoretical responsibility of affirming the law of identity, $A=A$ (S 1: 230). But in seeking to derive all philosophical thought from the I, Schelling cannot yet find a place for a meaningful distinction between reason and the other faculties. In a complete philosophical science "all the different faculties and actions that philosophy has ever named become one faculty only, one action (*Handlung*) of the same identical I" (S 1: 238n). Thought is the practical activity of positing finitude only so that this finitude can be overcome in a final thought of the whole. Theoretical philosophy may be useful in "surveying the boundaries" that these self-imposed limits present, but this surveying is nothing in itself, but a mere moment of the I's pure practical self-discovery (S 1: 238n).

Yet Schelling clearly was not satisfied with the complete dissolution of the faculties that *Of the I* foresaw and made frequent references to the various Kantian

faculties up through his period of identity philosophy (which lasted until 1806). In his 1797 “Treatises Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Wissenschaftslehre*” Schelling works to resuscitate Kant’s more articulated account of the faculties without compromising the gains with respect to freedom that Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* had made. Though Schelling maintains the position that the faculties are not ontologically distinct, he abandons the effort to reduce them all to reason, marking reason, the understanding, the imagination, and intuition as distinct modes of thinking, each with its own proper place. Accordingly, much of the essay seems to ignore the insights made in *Of the I*, as Schelling attempts to make viable a faculty epistemology that he has already rejected. In a footnote in the first volume of his collected works (published in 1809), Schelling writes of “Of the I” that “It shows idealism in its freshest form, in a sense which it may have lost later” (S 1: 159). In the “Treatises,” he even asks for forgiveness for glossing over some recent cutting-edge developments in idealism, claiming that his goal is to address the *spirit* of idealism and its competitors. Nevertheless, the essay shows the need for a separation of the tasks of reason and the understanding and thus manages to reopen the space of reason. By reconceiving as organic drives (and not as tremulous forces) what Kant had seen as abstractions explaining the free activity of the mind, Schelling begins to make the transition to his nature philosophy.

After a characteristically contemptuous renunciation of the idiocy of his contemporaries, Schelling launches into a Fichtean revision of the Kantian doctrine of the faculties, arguing that the ground of all thought (and hence of all reality) lies not in consciousness, but in a pre-conscious intuition (S 1: 442). Schelling acknowledges that intuition must in some sense be the *first* element of cognition, but he disagrees with the

Kantian conclusion that it is therefore the *lowest* form of cognition. Rather, it “is the highest in the human spirit, that from which all further cognition derives its validity and reality [*Realität*]” (S 1: 355). While some followers of Kant, seizing on the notion of the thing in itself, suppose that the contents of cognition are merely epiphenomenal to true reality, the very idea of such a pre-cognitive reality is unintelligible. Before the activity of the imagination, there can be nothing either bounded or unbounded. These followers seem to have ignored Kant’s admonition that the thing-in-itself is nothing but a limit concept. Tying Kant’s transcendental aesthetic to the Platonic notions of *peiras* and the *apeiron*, Schelling recounts how space provides an object with its extension, an extension which is entirely unlimited until time imposes the limitation of having to occupy one place at a time (S 1: 356). Thus it is only through time that space acquires the determinacy of the three dimensions, just as it is only through space that time is extended beyond a single point. Prior to these determinations, an object could not be finite or infinite, and thus could not *be* at all. But what Schelling is most interested in is not a delimited space or extended time as products of an intuitive faculty, but intuition in its activity (*Tätigkeit*). The simultaneous expansion of spatiality and determining of temporality comprise the unceasing activity of consciousness, which Schelling describes as “the constant striving of the spirit to become *finite* for itself; that is, to become conscious of itself” (S 1: 382). An intellectualistic obsession with the structure of sensible reality obscures the fact that at its ground is something more than a merely mechanically productive power. In order for organic (i.e., self-organizing) life to be possible, a form of self-organization must lie in its ground. At this point in the essay

Schelling declines to give a name for this ground, but he will later call it the *reason* that makes all self-reflection possible.

The dominant traditions of contemporary philosophy, however, which Schelling collectively calls “the sound understanding [*der gesunde Verstand*],” are inadequate for cognizing the organic. Instead of humanity’s essential activity, they seize upon products of nature and are unable to distinguish activity from productivity.²⁶ With the language of activity and productivity, Schelling is relying less on the ancient *praxis/poiesis* distinction than on a Fichtean revision of Spinoza’s distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (Pfau 30). For Spinoza in the *Ethics*,²⁷ these are but two sides of substance: God (or nature) is at once the self-knowing ground and what is grounded and known in this ground, and it is only through abstraction that the intellect can distinguish the two. As Schelling conceives the distinction, *natura naturans* is nature as acting and

²⁶While Schelling does not reference Schiller directly, his critique of the “sound understanding” resonates closely with Schiller’s 1794 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* in addition to Kant. In the first *Letter*, for instance, Schiller writes, “understanding begins by destroying the object of the inner sense before it can appropriate the object. Like the chemist, the philosopher finds synthesis only by analysis, or the spontaneous work of nature only through the torture of art. Thus, in order to detain the fleeting apparition, he must enchain it in the fetters of rule, dissect its fair proportions into abstract notions, and preserve its living spirit in a fleshless skeleton of words. Is it surprising that natural feeling should not recognise itself in such a copy, and if in the report of the analyst the truth appears as paradox?”. In the third *Letter*, Schiller elaborates on the insufficiency of the understanding by subordinating what is given by forces to what is given by laws—which he specifically links to reason. This repudiation of the supposed health of the understanding and the preference for laws over forces will form the core of Schelling’s Nature Philosophy and Transcendental Idealism. For more on Schelling’s reception of Schiller, see Wirth 2003, 61-2.

²⁷“*Natura naturans* is God regarded as free cause, insofar as He is in Himself and is conceived by Himself: or such attributes of substance as express the eternal and infinite essence. By *natura naturata*, I understand all that follows from the necessity of the divine nature, or from any of the attributes of God, all modes of the divine attributes, insofar as they are regarded as things which are in God and which without God can neither exist nor be conceived” (E1P29Sch).

natura naturata is nature as produced. While the latter may be organic (in the same way that lumber or detritus is organic), only the former is truly alive. Whereas in Euclidian geometry it is relatively simple to show the identity of activity and product (for the form of a circle is just the figure produced by tracing all the points equidistant from a common central point), the philosophical task of finding the identity of active spirit and the self as product is much more difficult. In particular, the understanding's efforts to find such an identity inevitably fail, as it always seeks to reduce phenomena to finite concepts. Concepts cannot capture the infinitude of activity, for they do not subsist independently, but always refer to other concepts. In the present essay Schelling suggests (without elaborating) that reason is the key to overcoming the understanding's reliance on dead concepts. In contrast to those guided by the sound understanding, those guided by reason feel quite at home in the organic activity of human freedom, for "no one who is not completely deprived of reason has ever claimed anything about speculative matters for which we could not find some foundation in human nature itself" (S 1: 363). Reason is thus a kind of corrective, drawing speculative thought back to human nature, never letting it lose its ground in freedom.

To demonstrate the indispensability of thinking activity in addition to productivity, Schelling appeals to that other great post-Cartesian rationalist, Leibniz. If only contemporary philosophers had read Leibniz more carefully, Schelling argues, they would see that things in themselves could not be dead, selfless (*selbstloses*) objects, but instead are capable of knowing and representing: "Or is the belief in a real (*wirkliche*) world—the element of our life and activity [*Handlung*—supposed to have originated not from immediate certainty but from (I do not know what kind of) shadow-plays of real

objects that are accessible not to the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] but to a deadened and unimaginative [*phantasielosen*] speculation?" (S 1: 358). Schelling fears that Kant may have intended precisely this morbid possibility in emphasizing the role of the understanding in the construction of objects. If the understanding enters on the scene only after the imagination has synthesized its pure intuitions, then it can "only *repeat* that original act of intuition wherein the object first existed" (S 1: 359). Thus Schelling criticizes not only those who rely on the understanding in formulating their accounts of consciousness, but also those who give the understanding a central role in cognition. The problem with contemporary philosophy, as Schelling sees it, is not just that the weak of spirit have fallen into mechanical thought, but that they seek to enforce this mechanism on everyone by denying any freedom in thought. Even the imagination, supposed by faculty psychologists to be the most spontaneous of all the faculties, is for them a machine operating by some opaque schematic process to convert intuitions into images.

In order to give an account of the structure of thought while still taking it as the absolute beginning of all reality, Schelling seeks to explain how concepts and schemata assist intuitions in cognition without reducing cognition to (merely) productive faculties (S 1: 359). Just as sensible objects need the finitude of time to appear as objects in three-dimensional space, intuitions in general need the finitude of schemata and concepts to appear as concrete things. But the separation of the understanding, imagination, and intuition is only a problem when seized upon by those who, lacking the synthetic power necessary to philosophize, give ontological weight only to the divisions in spirit they themselves create. Truly synthetic minds will recognize that in the wake of the modern separation of subject and object, the only way to reunite them is in a being that is itself

both subject and object, both representer and represented. While Leibniz had already recognized this in his theory of the monad, Fichte more clearly expounded on the necessity of a being that is both subject and object, which he located in the I. More explicitly than Leibniz or Kant, he showed that the activity at the ground of all reality is nothing other than free spirit.

Such a unification of opposites is only possible in something that is alive, for no dead force could hold itself together with its opposite without overcoming its aversion to this opposite. Yet that which is alive is precisely what we call spirit. Therefore, spirit lies at the base of the unification of subject and object. And since objects can only exist in relation to subjects, everything that exists originates in the spirit's act of intuiting itself (S 1: 370). Pure intuition, however, cannot mark the distinction between subject and object, which entails a move beyond intuition. Since recognizing something opposed to the I entails the ability to distinguish between the I and not I, a knowing subject can grasp objects as objects only through "the duplicity (*Duplicität*) of its inward and outward tendency" (S 1: 380). In many ways, Schelling's account of this duplicity of tendency mirrors Fichte's varying versions of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Following Fichte, he asserts that intuition begins in the interiority of the self. The self begins to limit itself by calling itself into question. It continually seeks its boundaries, but since it has not yet grasped how anything can be exterior to it, it works only to reproduce itself to infinity (S 1: 380). This, Schelling notes, is the process which gives the knowing subject a sense of continuity (S 1: 381). Through the experience of the non-absoluteness of boundaries, the knowing subject takes both itself and its environment (between which, of course, it cannot make a sharp distinction) as a realm of constant and conflicting activities. Its only

way to seize upon this realm is to take (posit) it as the product of distinct forces (though each is individually continuous) which have no principle of individuality, but which are merely reactive to other forces. This making of static forces out of flowing activity is the first move out of the realm of continuity, and thus “Only in the act of production does the spirit become aware of its *finitude*” (S 1: 381). Production and self-consciousness of finitude arise simultaneously. Or rather, since time is itself the original production of finitude (just as space is the original production of infinity), temporal reflection on time, finitude, and production reveal that the three are united in bringing about the self-differentiation of spirit. Production, then, is the concretization, or as Hegel will later say, the *externalization*²⁸ of spirit, and hence its self-division. History is thus comprised of this self-division, and “All acts of the spirit thus aim at *presenting* [darzustellen] *the infinite within the finite*. The goal of all these acts is self-consciousness, and their history is none other than the *history of self-consciousness*” (S 1: 382). History’s stages (*Zustände*) are its progressively sophisticated measures for overcoming the finitude inherent in all presentation. The sequential representation of time (similar to what Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls the “ordinary conception of time”) arises from the

²⁸In fact, Schelling also describes this productivity in terms of externalization. In a passage remarkably similar to the penultimate paragraph of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Schelling writes, “We thus will thus think the soul as an activity that continually strives to produce [*hervorzubringen*] something finite from the infinite. It is as though the soul comprised an infinity that it is *constrained to present outside itself*. This cannot be explained any further, except by referring to the constant striving of the spirit to become finite for itself; that is, to become conscious of itself” (S 1: 382, my emphasis). Here Schelling makes explicit what is already implicit in the German word *hervorbringen*: production is an externalization, a bringing-to-the-fore-out-of. The I’s production of itself through becoming conscious of itself, which Schelling here calls the activity of the soul, is thus an externalization of the infinite through presentation—precisely the lesson of the *Phenomenology*’s “Absolute Knowing.”

spirit's attempts to present the infinite. Since the infinite cannot be presented in a single moment, the spirit posits everything to exist in a succession of time (S 1: 384).

Yet Schelling is critical of the Fichtean assumption that this union of activity and product can be located in consciousness. Since it is a subjectivity that has already made itself into an object, consciousness arrives on the scene too late. The origin of consciousness must be in a still undetermined unity of activity and product.

Consciousness arises from "the constant striving of the spirit to become *finite* for itself; that is, to become conscious of itself" (S 1: 382). Since this striving for finitude precedes consciousness, it must pervade not only consciousness itself, but also what it takes to be external to itself. The absolute's striving for finitude is prior to consciousness's separation of subject and object.

Continuing his incorporation of Leibnizian philosophy, Schelling toys with the possibility that this pre-conscious striving is a striving of representations (*Vorstellungen*) for representations. As Schelling takes Leibniz to have shown, representations have the advantage of being both continuous and self-reproducing: "No representation is merely *static* within the soul because it is nothing other than an activity of the soul; rather it is continuous and, as it were, in flux. Thus every representation, that is, every necessary activity of the soul, produces from itself a new one" (S 1: 384). Neither in the present essay nor in any other from this period does Schelling develop a metaphysical doctrine of representation that would explain why it is continuous and reproductive, and given the essay's critical stance toward Reinhold, it is doubtful that the latter's theory of representation plays a significant role, but Schelling's cursory comments are evocative of Leibniz's *Monadology*, in which each monad's perceptions pass into other perceptions

without any external cause (Leibniz 6: 609, §17). In this sense, we can take Schelling's assertion that "there inheres a succession in our representations that supports our very existence" (S 1: 384) to state (in bare outline) that the primordial activity of spirit that allows for a conscious division of subject from object is a fluid representative activity that constantly produces further finite representations, only to have these representations dissolve back into the infinite activity from which finite things derive. Schelling can thus identify representation as the "necessary activity of the soul" because the activity which constitutes the soul is nothing other than representation. Through representations, the soul is thus its own cause and effect; the representations which the soul produces are themselves the cause of its continuing productivity (S 1: 386).

Though he denies that representations are epiphenomenal to spiritual activity in the same way that consciousness is, Schelling nevertheless leaves them on the periphery of his inquiry. Far more important than representation in the present essay is the notion of "productive force [*produktive Kraft*]." Unlike the blind, dead forces of Newtonian mechanics, these forces are self-organizing and evolving. Alternately breaking through static patterns of forces and forming new limitations, nature's productive force "gradually configures raw matter to itself" (S 1: 387). Productive force remakes matter, as it were, in its own image, matter which is then expressive of this force and able to propagate it. Yet this force is not a static template only able to reproduce a pre-given form. Because there is nothing but its own drive tying it to a particular form, productive force modifies itself in response to external resistance. Since such an evolutionary force is not tied to any particular concept, the understanding will fail to grasp its self-organizing nature, and thus it calls for a higher form of thinking—namely, reason, which alone can cognize

purposiveness and freedom. Yet even given this reconceiving of force as evolutionary and self-organizing, not even a productive force can define the human being: “Everything about the human being carries the character of freedom. Fundamentally, he is a being that dead nature has released from its guardianship and thereby entrusted to the fortunes of his own (internally conflicting) forces” (S 1: 388-9). While an expanded conception of the place of forces in nature is necessary to think human freedom, it is not sufficient.

At this point, Schelling still conceives of the understanding as a faculty, and more specifically as “a secondary, derivative, and ideal faculty” (S 1: 422). While he had earlier criticized those who seek to understand the spirit’s activity in terms of such an abstract and formal concept as that of the “faculty” (S 1: 392-3), he apparently does not believe anything is lost by using such an abstraction to characterize the functioning of the understanding. The understanding is merely parasitic on the intuition, abstracting dead concepts from the intuition’s living (i.e., self-possessed and self-organizing) unity of subjectivity and objectivity. The understanding adds no content to cognition, for its categories “do not actually express anything but the most primordial and necessary mode of activity, the primordial *synthesis whereby* alone any object *becomes* and *originates*” (S 1: 422). The products of the understanding thus are reproductions of the vitality of original synthesis.²⁹

²⁹But already in the “Treatises” Schelling indicates that the designation of the understanding as a faculty is not an absolute one. It is only from “the standpoint of consciousness,” Schelling writes, that “*understanding* and *sensibility* are two altogether *distinct faculties* [*Vermögen*], and *intuition* and *concept* are two *altogether distinct activities* [*Handlungen*] (S 1, 423). Prior to the reflection of consciousness (that is, the conceptual representation of the products of intuition), neither these faculties nor these activities are distinguishable as constituents of cognition.

This mechanistic account of the understanding as a discrete and parasitic faculty helps to highlight the extent to which Schelling now considers reason something far greater than a faculty, and in some ways as identical with human thought itself. Yet here Schelling qualifies this identification of reason and thinking in general to a greater extent than he had in *Of the I*. He seeks to maintain distinctions between theoretical and practical reason, imagination and activity, at the same time that he dissolves them. While Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason is useful for showing that cognition is always both real and ideal, both necessitated by something preceding subjectivity and a free act of the subject, we would be wrong to infer from this that theoretical and practical reason are two different employments of a unitary faculty. An act of reason that is only practical or only theoretical is unintelligible, for practical activity presupposes the imagination's³⁰ theoretical capacity to conceive of possibilities, while theoretical activity always presupposes goal-directed activity (S 1: 431). Whereas the understanding and its dead products can be separated from the living activity of the spirit, theoretical and practical reason are inseparable.

This denial of a primordial difference between theoretical and practical reason is an implicit attack on Fichte (an attack that Fichte tried again and again to answer by refining his concept of *Anstoss*). While Schelling directs his comments at Reinhold and Beck, his language clearly implicates Fichte as well. The I's act of positing a not-I, Schelling argues, must be grounded in something prior to the I, for otherwise such positing only takes place within the idea (*in der Idee*), not in any real encounter of the I

³⁰As Schelling here conceives it, the imagination is not a separate faculty, but just a designation for theoretical reason, insofar as it is subordinated to practical reason (S 1: 431). The imagination is thus as little distinguished from other faculties as theoretical reason is separable from practical reason.

with the not-I (S 1: 410). Any cognition that takes place only on the conceptual³¹ level is never a necessary act, but always a free, ideal one (S 1: 419). This objection would resurface in Schelling's 1827 Munich *Lectures on the History of Recent Philosophy*, where Schelling accuses Hegel's system of never leaving the certainty of the realm of thought to deal with reality and exhorts philosophers to supplement such "negative philosophy" with a "positive philosophy" that actively pursues external reality. The core of this critique, which in its reformulations in Schelling's lectures on the philosophies of *Mythology* and *Revelation* would inspire the most important mid-nineteenth century critiques of Hegel (including those of Engels and Kierkegaard), is already present in the 1797 "Treatises." Schelling reasons that the positing of the not-I must be grounded in something other than the I, "for that act of opposing is a *free* act, accompanied by *consciousness*, not a *primordial* and hence not a *necessary* act" (S 1: 410-1). The implied opposition between a free act and one grounded in something ontologically prior to the self will dissolve in the *Freedom* essay, but otherwise this passage reflects Schelling's consistent rejection of an idealism grounded merely in subjectivity. Any systematic philosophy will have to ground self- and other-positing in an impulse (to attempt to translate Fichte's *Anstoss*), or, as Schelling will increasingly describe it, in a striving (*Streben*) of representations to appear in consciousness. Such striving precedes all subjectivity, and hence all positing or consciousness. This primordial striving is at once theoretical and practical, for it precedes the original practical activity of self-positing.

³¹Schelling does not hold fast to Kant's terminological distinction between the products of the understanding (concepts) and the products of reason (ideas), but his meaning is nevertheless clear. The problem with the brand of idealism he is attacking is not just that it seeks to reduce subjectivity to mechanical concepts (and Schelling thinks that Fichte avoids this trap), but that it never allows the freedom of reason to unify itself with the necessity that always confronts it.

Thus the task of idealistic philosophy, Schelling puts forth, is to analyze the structure of this striving. It is not enough merely to accept that the I posits itself, for self-positing is built upon an extraordinarily complex network of pre-conscious activity. Schelling has identified this activity as organic, but this is more of a paradigm for future studies than a scientific conclusion. In his nature philosophy, Schelling will need to show in what way reason's striving is organic, how its organism works, and what it needs to stay alive.

Chapter 2: Organic Reason

“What an abyss of forces we gaze down into here.” (S 3: 111n)

In this note appended to his *First Projection of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* for a lecture course at Jena, Schelling marvels at the incomprehensibility of magnetism. Not only do magnets behave differently in the northern and southern hemispheres, but even a slight change in their orientation can drastically change the extent to which they can lose or gain magnetic properties. Our understanding of nature seems marooned among these forces, its compass wholly unable to discern whether we stride atop the world or crawl along its underbelly. Despite the tremendous wealth of forces that had been discovered between Newton’s hermetic mechanical investigations and Lavoisier’s revolutionary chemistry, the science of Schelling’s day had failed to identify what could unify these forces. Magnetism, a form of action-at-a-distance far rarer than gravity or electricity, was the most bewildering force of all, with its polarity and contagiousness from one mass of iron to another. Yet Schelling’s reflection on this situation shows an awe, not a desperation. For it is not we on whom Schelling is gazing, but the understanding and its forces. Though any abyss is liable to inspire vertigo, we are in no danger of falling in—unless, of course, we choose to jump. The ground of Schelling’s early confidence is his assuredness that reason, which, unlike the understanding, does not make forces its sole object, is identical with the life of the world. That force is unprethinkable (*unvordenklich*) is not a challenge to reason, and it is a challenge to the stature of humanity only to the extent that humanity is to be determined by forces. From this standpoint, magnetism seems no longer an abyss of forces, but a phenomenon firmly grounded in the first cause of all motion—for, like all planets, “the

Earth is nothing other than a great magnet” (S 3: 122n). The challenge of all Schelling’s philosophy through at least 1809 is to give the “infinite opposition” that comprises this ground as much sense as possible, and it is in the Nature Philosophy that reason first comes to occupy the center of this search for ground.

In this chapter, I will work through the three major works of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, showing how reason becomes concretized not just as a regulative method for approaching nature, but as constitutive of nature itself. In the 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling explains Kant’s observation in third *Critique* that only reason has access to the self-organizing structure of organisms by showing that reason itself has the structure of organic life. In the 1798 *On the World-Soul*, Schelling argues that reason not only has the structure of organic nature, but is the very source of this structure in nature. And in the 1799 *First Projection of a System of Nature Philosophy*, he makes reason the end of nature by presenting the sequence of inhibitions that allows nature to develop into a reason capable of knowing itself. First, however, the almost universally poor reception of Schelling’s nature philosophy after 1820 or so has made necessary a justification for examining these texts in the first place—a justification not required of the equally underread *System of Transcendental Idealism*, for example, which is often dismissed as a superceded moment of philosophy, but not as meaningless juvenilia.³² Long before Hegel,³³ in a *Zusatz* added as an introduction to the 1830 version

³²See Snow 67 ff. and Esposito 9 ff. for lengthier discussions of this poor reception of Schelling’s Nature Philosophy.

³³In no uncertain terms, Hegel describes Schelling’s Nature Philosophy as “a procedure which was as fantastic as it was pretentious, which itself made a chaotic mixture of crude empiricism and uncomprehended thoughts, of a wholly capricious exercise of the imagination and the most commonplace way of proceeding by superficial analogy, and which passed off such a hodgepodge as the idea, reason, philosophical science, and

of the *Philosophy of Nature*, attempts to distance himself from what he calls the “charlatanism” (*Schwindeleien*) of the Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*, others had rejected the *Naturphilosophie* as pseudo-scientific mumbo-jumbo. The Dutch physicist Hans Christian Oersted, for instance, categorically denied that there was any but the most superficial connection between his theory of electromagnetism and the one Schelling had been propounding when Oersted was his student (Snelders 232). Perhaps the greatest hindrance to greater acceptance of the *Naturphilosophie* was Schelling’s insistence that his discussions of such peculiarities as universal organisms and organic reason were not meant metaphorically. In claiming that reason is organic, Schelling does not just mean that reason is like an organism in the sense that it takes in external material, gives it its own shape, and expands its boundaries in the process, though reason indeed possesses all these characteristics. Rather, Schelling wants to redefine what it means for something to be organic, clearly a frustration for natural scientists and others who assume the organic has already been sufficiently defined as to make all talk of its ensoulment (*Beseelung*) unnecessary. Yet Schelling contends that an adequate concept of the organic is inaccessible to the scientific understanding and thus calls for a higher form of thought. If he is right, then the *Naturphilosophie* cannot merely be replaced by more recent scientific discoveries. The fact that all organic compounds hitherto discovered have contained hydrocarbons does not entail that we can even provisionally define ‘organic’ as “containing certain carbon compounds.”

divine knowledge, and pretended that the complete lack of method and scientific procedure was the acme of scientific procedure” (H 9: 9).

While we already saw some of Schelling's reasons for advocating a new concept of the organic in *Of the I* and the "Treatises," perhaps his clearest (though not most comprehensive) critique of applying the understanding to nature appears in the 1797 *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature as Introduction to the Study of this Science*. Although the work appeared in a second, slightly revised version in 1803, Schelling never added the chapter on organic nature that he thought necessary to complete the project. As one would expect, the account of reason we see in the *Ideas* is less organic than what we find in later *Naturphilosophie* works, with Schelling contending that reason offers a more adequate way of *approaching nature* (rather than allowing nature to grow into self-revelation) than the understanding. True, there are hints that reason gives structure to nature, but for the sake of clarity I will address these claims in the texts where Schelling develops them more fully.³⁴

In *The Abyss of Freedom*, Slavoj Žižek argues that for Schelling, it is reason's willingness to subordinate the sacred to the profane within the latter's sphere that distinguishes it from the understanding (Žižek 1997, 14). To recall Žižek's paradigmatic example, where reason can accept that the church must be subordinated to the state within the state's proper sphere (say, by prohibiting organized prayer in schools), the understanding, once it takes service of God to be its mastering principle, can accept only theocracy. There is clearly something of this insight in Schelling's accounts of the distinction in the *Freedom* essay and *Weltalter*, and we can even find passages suggesting that Schelling was working toward this schema in the *Ideas* and other early works

³⁴Though the *Ideas* lack the developed account of the relation of reason and nature of *On the World Soul* and the *First Projection*, they also give the understanding a much richer role and accordingly show that there is a place for understanding the abyssal forces of nature.

(reason's subordination of the necessary laws of general dynamics in the profane study of chemistry, for instance, follows this pattern—*Ideas*, p. 200). But looking to Schelling's nature philosophy shows, first, that Hegel may be treating the understanding unfairly and, second, that schematic definitions will fail to capture the inexhaustible sense of the distinction between reason and the understanding. The distinction cannot fail to take on a new sense when it is placed within a systematic account of the potencies of dynamic nature.

Schematism has its place, though, and beginning with the schematic structures of reason and the understanding developed in the *Ideas* will not only give us a sense of the fixed references of these terms, but will also show the groundwork for Schelling's more organic conception of reason. In the *Ideas*, Schelling sees the work of reason and the understanding as converging into a unified philosophy of nature. While at times Schelling associates the understanding with natural science and reason with philosophy, he abandons the Kantian architecture that treats them as faculties of spirit and analyzes them instead as forms of striving. Drawing on his dalliances with natural science, Schelling sees every striving as a complex of urges. Just as matter achieves its solidity through a combination of attractive and repulsive impulses, reason and the understanding are kept alive by the multiplicity of their urges. In particular, each consists of what I will call a grounding and a guiding urge, which bring the striving into being and struggle (sometimes with each other) for fulfillment.³⁵

³⁵Though they are certainly related, we should not conflate these forms of striving with the first two potencies (*Potenzen*). In the *Ideas*, at least, reason and the understanding are introduced independently of the potencies, before Schelling attempts to incorporate them into a history of spirit through intuition. At this stage of his career Schelling's doctrine of

I will begin with reason, since Schelling deems it relatively unproblematic to describe it as a form of striving. On the second page of the Introduction to the *Ideas*, Schelling introduces separation (*Trennung*) as the grounding urge of reason. I have chosen to emphasize the word ‘separation’ over the related terms Schelling uses not only because of its prevalence in the *Ideas* and other texts,³⁶ but also because of its semantic neutrality. ‘Transcendence,’ ‘bifurcation’ (*Entzweiung*), and ‘measure’ also describe this grounding urge of reason, but each carries a stronger and more specific semantic content than ‘separation.’ Schelling claims that philosophy begins “as soon as man sets himself in opposition to the external world” (S 2: 13). Invoking man as fundamental to philosophy is clearly problematic, for reasons that Schelling expounds upon amply in the Identity Philosophy and *Freedom* essay. But I do not think that the invocation of man *here* shows anything essentially problematic about Schelling’s definition of philosophy. Immediately after introducing this separation, Schelling states that it also appears as the separation of object from intuition, of concept from image, and of man from himself (S 2: 13). By the next page, Schelling has dropped man altogether and speaks only of reason being grounded in “the original separation [*ursprüngliche Trennung*]” (S 2: 14). Complicating matters is the flexibility of Schelling’s terminology. While at times he seems to identify the understanding and reason with the disciplines of natural science and philosophy, respectively, at other times he wants to keep them separate. While he later

potencies is loose and undeveloped. Later, Schelling will in his Identity Philosophy seek to define the potencies without reference to striving at all (S 4: 124).

³⁶*Trennung* remains an important term in Schelling’s philosophical vocabulary throughout his nature philosophy, idealism, and identity philosophy. As late as the *Stuttgarter Privatvorlesungen* (1810) he continues to name the grounding urge of reason a *Trennung* (S 7: 424). In these lectures Schelling argues that separation is not a cancellation of identity, but “a doubling [*Doublirung*] of the essence, and thus an intensification of the unity” in the absolute (S 7: 425).

states that it is only reason and not the understanding that begins with separation, in the Introduction he claims that it is philosophy as a whole that begins with separation. Yet the understanding cannot possess the grounding urge of separation, since it (as we will see later) refuses to accept any discontinuities in the world. But it is not quite right either to say that the work of the understanding is not a part of philosophy, for Schelling devotes a large portion of the *Ideas* to showing exactly how the forces posited by the understanding fit into the philosophy of nature. Perhaps, then, when Schelling says that philosophy begins with separation, he means that the understanding is a later and derivative stage of philosophy. In the second book of the *Ideas*, Schelling suggests that reason's striving is in some sense prior to that of the understanding, since the understanding strives for continuity of things that it already knows to be self-identical (S 2: 215). But reason is equally dependent on the understanding for the production of the concepts for whose identity reason strives, and thus we should take the claim that philosophy begins with separation to be referring only to the striving of reason. We cannot simply conflate philosophy and reason in the *Ideas*, but nonetheless I submit that by philosophy here Schelling means only the striving of reason, not that of the understanding. The understanding, as a drive separate from reason, does not begin with separation, though it can reflect on reason's grounding urge as an original equilibrium of forces.

Yet the structure of reason is such that it cannot accept this separation as absolute. Reason strives to show that this original separation is only relative to consciousness, subjectivity, and so on, and that subject and object are essentially identical. Thus identity is what we may call reason's guiding urge. The Nature Philosophy seeks not only

resonance between the real and the ideal, but their identity. Ultimately, this means that reason cannot see itself as distinct in any way from its objects; judged absolutely, they are one. In the context of the *Ideas*, this means that nature “should not only *express*, but even *realize* the laws of our spirit, and that it is and is called nature only insofar as it does so” (S 2: 55-6). With this methodological assumption, Schelling raises the Fichtean doctrine of the primacy of practical reason to a higher level. For Schelling in the *Ideas*, nature is not the negative of reason, to be submitted to it as reason makes the world its home, but is already in the process of turning itself into a home for reason.

As we saw in Chapter 1, the fact that reason strives to establish the identity of subject and object was already emphasized by Fichte and the earliest Schelling. But what makes Schelling’s Nature Philosophy unique on this matter is the extent to which he avoids reducing this striving to an activity of man (cf. S 2: 13). Though Schelling never wrote the projected third part of the *Ideas* that was to be devoted to organic life, this highest stage of nature is clearly on his mind as he remakes the Kantian faculties. Like organisms, reason and the understanding are self-organizing, giving living form to what is otherwise lifeless. But also like organisms, each is also subject to its own varieties of disease and dissolution. Reason’s characteristic sickness is what Schelling calls “mere reflection” (S 2: 13). Mere reflection is an urge that seizes on the original divorce of reason and seeks to cancel the urge of identity. By separating spirit from the phenomenal world, “it fills the intelligible world with chimeras, against which, because they lie beyond all reason, it is not even possible to fight. It makes that separation between man and the world permanent, because it treats the latter as a thing in itself, which neither intuition nor imagination, neither understanding nor reason, reach” (S 2: 14). By

cancerously magnifying reason's grounding urge, reflection cancels the urge of identity, and thus kills the striving of reason entirely. It does not take an especially acute oncological eye to recognize such neoplasms in philosophy, and unfortunately, they can be malignant. It is far too easy, upon recognizing the triviality of one's former undifferentiated thought, to make the division and redoubling of categories one's sole urge, disregarding a sense for the integrity of the whole.³⁷ In its striving to unify itself with its world, reason is unwilling to accept reflection as simply opposed to it. Instead, it makes reflection a mere means and takes it into itself, subordinating it to its own striving as a whole (S 2: 13).

Schelling is more ambivalent about whether the understanding is also a form of striving, as he shows by asking, "Is not the understanding a dead faculty?" (S 2: 44). Here Schelling seems to say at once that the understanding is both striving and not striving. In Kant, at least, a faculty is an abstract way of conceiving a cognitive ability possessed by a rational being. As strictly abstract, it is not the sort of thing that can be alive or dead. The very attribution of death to a faculty seems to be what Ryle would call a category mistake. But given the intensity of his attempt to link life and cognition Schelling clearly intends something by calling the understanding a dead faculty. He could mean it redundantly, as a trope of emphasis, much as we might say of a man going

³⁷Here the reference to man is more problematic than the earlier reference to the separation of man and existence. For Schelling describes reflection not as a sickness of reason or as an inhibition of its striving but as a sickness of man. Schelling undermines the hegemony of man somewhat by arguing that man is not by nature philosophical and subject to the dangers of reflection (*Ideas*, p. 9), but still it is hard to think of reflection as a sickness without thinking of it in terms of the threat it poses to man. While Schelling's deanthropicization of reason as striving for identity amidst an original separation is compelling, we must be careful not to bring man back into the picture when judging reflection a sickness of reason's striving.

through a divorce, “He’s just a dead shell of his former self.” Obviously, anyone who is just a shell of a man would be equally dead to the world. In this case, Schelling would be suggesting that because the understanding is (now) only a faculty, it is therefore dead. Or we could take “dead faculty” in the same way that we take Schelling’s references to dead matter (S 2: 200; S 2: 215), and thus Schelling could be suggesting that faculties—such as reason or perhaps the imagination—can be alive, but the faculty of the understanding lacks the self-organizing force to go on living. In both cases, we can infer that the understanding, or at least some predecessor whose corpse it has calcified into, was once alive. Is the understanding the sort of thing that can die, or is this a lifeless metaphor? Or is it only dead as a faculty (and not absolutely), having been resurrected in another form? Schelling declines to give a definitive answer, granting the understanding only the most tenuous claim to life, suggesting that it can only sustain itself on dead matter. For the understanding, “instead of creating the actual” seems to “borrow its own reality from actuality itself” (S 2: 44). Thus the understanding seems to be a parasite, remaining on the exterior of organic things and taking its form from their superficial organization: “And is it not merely the slavishness of this faculty, its capacity for describing the *outlines* [*Umrisse*] of the real,” Schelling asks, “which sets up a connection [*Vermittlung*] between itself and the reality?” (S 2: 44). This recalls Schelling’s discussion of relative animality. What we normally call animals are really only relatively animal, Schelling maintains, for they depend upon the inorganic world to sustain them. Only the “world-body” is absolutely animal, for “it contains everything it needs to sustain itself” (S 2: 218-9). The understanding, likewise, is relatively animal, because it, too, is parasitic on something inorganic. Rather than containing within itself only what is self-organizing,

the understanding props itself up with dead principles. For example, Newtonian mechanics recognizes the invariable co-presence of centrifugal and centripetal forces, but so long as it sees them as mere forces, it cannot appreciate the organic basis of their unity. “For knowledge of these exalted relationships, the understanding is thus wholly dead—they are evident only to reason” (S 2: 200). The concepts in which the understanding deals “are mere silhouettes of reality” (S 2: 215). The mixed metaphors here should not be taken merely as a sign of inconsistency or of Schelling’s youthful exuberance—he was, after all, only 22 when the first edition of the *Ideas* appeared. Rather, we should recognize in these metaphors the inexhaustibility of meaning continually reproduced in the striving of reason and the understanding. Though reason and the understanding are formally limited by their grounding and guiding urges, neither a discourse of life and death nor one of light and shadow can have a monopoly on the sense of their respective striving.

But for each of these senses, we can say schematically that the understanding’s flaw is its inability to recognize the identity that organization yields. The difference between the organic and the inorganic, Schelling writes, is that “Every organic product carries the ground of its existence in *itself*, for it is cause and effect of itself” (S 2: 40). And, to make perfectly clear that this ground is an ideal one accessible only to reason’s striving after identity, Schelling elaborates: “Thus *a concept* lies at the base of every organization, for where there is a necessary relation of the whole to the part and of the part to the whole, there is *concept*” (S 2: 41, Schelling’s emphasis). Here the unity of concept and object is not ideal, but real. That is, Schelling’s nature philosophy shows the unity of concept and object not in spirit’s knowing, as in the philosophy of transcendental

idealism, but instead in the object itself. With this claim of immanence, Schelling means primarily that the recognition of an organism's organization is not arbitrary but necessitated by the very existence of the organism (S 2: 42). We as rational beings have no choice but to see the organism as producing its own end, and yet the understanding is unable to conceive of this self-positing.³⁸ Such self-organizing of the concept is inaccessible to the understanding, for which concepts are merely appended to phenomena. The understanding can attempt to ground this organization in a mysterious "life force," much as Newton's successors posited an actual force of gravity somehow inhering in all matter. But the very idea of a life force, Schelling argues, is contradictory, for a force can only be conceived as something finite. If there is any force at all, it must be limited (*gehemmt*) by another force. Whether we conceive the forces in equilibrium or in eternal polemic, we need an external organizing principle to do so. These forces cannot be unified into a single force, as such a force would itself only be intelligible in relation to other forces. What gives life its determination, namely organization, cannot be a force, and thus cannot be exhausted as an object of the understanding.

Yet despite these limits of the understanding, organic nature is not solely the province of reason. The understanding is vital for apprehending the continuity of nature across the phenomena of electricity, magnetism, and chemistry. Reason, focused as it is on the polarity of measure and identity, fails to apprehend the continuity of nature, for "nothing that *comes to be* in Nature *comes to be* by a leap; all *becoming* occurs in a

³⁸Kant gives us a version of this principle when, in the *Critique of Judgment*, he notes the wisdom of those who dissect living beings with the assumption that "nothing in such a creature is *gratuitous*" (K 5: 376). Unlike the self-assured scholar who thinks that it is up to science to decide whether and what parts of nature are vestigial, the dissectionist perceives the compulsion that self-organizing beings present to reason.

continuous sequence” (S 2: 172, Schelling’s emphasis). While reason strives to find identity in difference, the understanding strives for the continuity of all being. In the terminology I introduced earlier, we can say that the understanding consists of the grounding urge of totality and the guiding urge of continuity.

Rather than beginning with separation, the understanding begins by placing all of its objects in a common field (S 2: 21-2). Everything that is, it presumes, can be explained. Schelling addresses this grounding urge most clearly in his discussion of whether chemistry can be a science. In the *Ideas*, chemistry is the second level of physical science, more basic than Newtonian mechanics, the study of relative motion, but not as fundamental as dynamics, the study of attraction and repulsion as the basic constituents of matter. Since the understanding aims for totality, it takes as complete sciences only those studies that can exhaust their subject matter under a common principle. Schelling contends that the regularities that had been found in affinities between the various forms of matter were not of the sort that can be totalized over the whole range of matters, and thus chemistry could never be a science unless it turned out that all chemical affinities could be explained by matter’s dynamic properties—which, with the electron valence theory, is exactly what happened. But then, the science would be dynamics, and chemistry would be “nothing else but *applied dynamics*, or *dynamics considered in its contingency*” (S 2: 276).

Set against this urge for totality is the urge for continuity. Thus, for instance, the understanding takes discrete objects of perception and seeks the inner continuity that comprises them (S 2: 21-2). As Schelling shows in his analysis of the physics of George Louis le Sage, mechanistic atomism is always only a provisional position for the

understanding (S 2: 207 ff.). For upon positing a world of corpuscles, its urge of continuity will lead it to investigate the constitution of these corpuscles, subdividing until it finally reaches something continuous. The understanding cannot conceive of absolute indivisibility, for this forestalls the possibility of a force powerful enough to divide such basic particles. Thus the understanding is compelled to posit not matter but force as the ultimate constituent of the universe. And this is why Schelling places at the foundation of all natural science not physics (by which he means Newtonian mechanics, the study of the motion of already constituted bodies), but dynamics, the study of the expansive and contractive forces that give rise to motion and extension.

Since it is a simpler form of striving, the understanding's characteristic illness is also simpler than that of reason. Just as reason's characteristic illness emerges when its grounding urge is uninhibited, so can the uninhibited urge for totality become pathological. But rather than the cancerous opposition of one urge against another, the plague of the understanding is cirrhosis. When the urge for totality is unchecked, it collapses vast ranges of objects into undifferentiated lumps, leaving them unconnected to other vital systems, often leaving a jagged wasteland in its wake. Where reason's excessive divisions can go undetected or appear benign for a time, the violence of the understanding's excesses are often felt almost immediately. When the scientist reimagines nature's joints, we can often tell that he has eroded its inner continuity. This cirrhosis should not be confused with the normal parasitic and saprophytic functioning of the understanding. Since it lacks the guiding urge of identity, the understanding cannot help but analyze its objects into matter which gets its impetus externally. Cirrhosis results only when the urge for totality vastly overpowers the urge for continuity.

By suggesting that reason and the understanding are vulnerable to sickness, however, Schelling shows his new determinations of them are far from purely schematic. He has already begun to re-conceive them no longer as faculties of a living intelligence, but as organisms themselves. While this content gives a vitality to the concepts of understanding and reason that a schematic conception lacks, we must be aware of the infectious dangers of such content. By the time of the *Ideas*, Schelling had added a tremendous complexity to Spinoza and Fichte's already rich concepts of *conatus* and *Anstoss*, concepts that Schelling continued to refine in his later considerations of *Streben*, *Sehnsucht*, *Verlangen*, and *Wollen*. This excessive determination of striving is precisely why we should leave the striving of reason and the understanding underdetermined. Since Schelling's nature philosophy approaches the striving of matter (and especially organic matter) through both the understanding and reason, these determinations themselves privilege either reason or the understanding. For example, whereas the understanding may see striving as a complex of forces, reason may see it as a longing for return to identity. Since both reason and the understanding are inexhaustible, any such generalizations about the content of the interpretation of striving would be inadequate. Only purely schematic descriptions can remain indifferent to reason and the understanding. With the introduction of the organic into our accounts of the structure of reason and the understanding, we risk privileging reason, since only it can grasp the teleology of organic life. Yet ironically, by interpreting sickness as a disequilibrium of forces, Schelling actually prioritizes the understanding in weighing the comparative health of these two forms of striving. In the *First Projection* two years later, Schelling will seek to bring illness under the domain of the reason by presenting a new theory that

traces illness to the organism's own inner activity and the disproportion of drives that arises when it takes external stimulants into itself.

Perhaps even more insidious is way we have seen the concept of man keep creeping back into Schelling's accounts. Near the end of the Introduction Schelling warns that it might be impossible to separate man from the Kantian faculties: "It is clear that our critique has come full circle, but not that we have become in any degree wiser than we were to begin with, about that antithesis from which we started. We leave behind man, as evidently the most devious problem of all philosophy, and our critique ends here in the same extremity with which it began" (S 2: 54). While Schelling probably intends this complete denial of progress tongue-in-cheek, it does point to a profound difficulty in making a neutral distinction between the faculties. Perhaps avoiding a prioritization of man requires a discipline just as strict as the post-Kantian prohibition against application of the understanding to reason.

In 1798 Schelling published the work that would earn him great esteem in the Jena community, including that of its most famous member, Goethe. In characteristic Schellingian verbosity, the work was titled *On the World-Soul, a Hypothesis of Higher Physics toward the Explanation of the Universal Organism. With an Essay on the Relation of the Real and Ideal in Nature, or Development of the first Ground of Nature Philosophy into the Principles of Gravity and Light*. Despite this ponderous title, Schelling begins his Preface to the first edition rather modestly, insisting on only two things to avoid being misunderstood. First, Schelling wants in the work more than anything else to avoid imposing an artificial (*erkünstelte*) unity of principles on nature (S

2: 347). “I hate nothing more,” he insists, “than that mindless [*Geistlose*] endeavor to eliminate the variety of natural things through pretentious [*erdichtete*] identities” (S 2: 347-8). But at the same time, Schelling refuses to accept claims of the inexplicability of the world due solely to this variety. Such claims represent the worst failures of reason and indicate not only the triumph of superstition, but a failure of character. Schelling thus ups the ante on the contempt for dogmatism displayed in Fichte’s 1797/8 *Wissenschaftslehre*. Not only is it reflective of a slavish character to assume that the origin of thought is outside the I, but even the failure to work through idealism to its conclusion in the unity of all reality with thought belies such a slavishness. For Schelling (as for Fichte), idealism carries with it a categorical imperative. The demand of philosophy is not just the hypothetical assertion that one should be an idealist if one wants to be able to explain all reality, but the absolute claim that one simply *ought* to learn how to identify oneself with all reality.

Unlike the *Ideas*, *On the World-Soul* contains parts on both inorganic and organic nature, and Schelling’s main organizational principle holds that both reflect the same universal tendencies in nature. In carrying this project through, Schelling further distances himself from Kant’s metaphysics of nature by breaking down the distinction between determined natural forces and spontaneous rational action. The distinction in the “Treatises” and *Ideas* between forces as objects of the understanding and identity as the guiding urge of reason is not as sharp in the *World-Soul*, as Schelling seeks to analyze nature’s identity in terms of forces. The original forces that Schelling seeks are not those that the understanding posits to explain empirical nature, but “limit concepts [*Grenzbegriffe*]” conceived to allow for the intelligibility of nature while at the same time

securing its freedom (S 2: 386). The infinity of possible forces that Schelling previously conceived as abyssal opens up “an infinite play-space [*Spielraum*] in which [dynamic philosophy] can explain all phenomena empirically, that is, from the reciprocal activity of various materials” (S 2: 386). The theory of the world-soul is not an attempt to explain distinct phenomena in terms of categories given by the understanding, but is a play-space for advancing and retracting theories of nature. Thus the imperative of idealism does not require one to accept Schelling’s specific analyses of forces in *On the World-Soul*, but merely that all nature’s forces can be unified with reason.

This does not imply that we can simply abstract a doctrine of reason from Schelling’s discussions of nature’s specific forces, however. Just as reason is not simply a lens that can be applied to nature from the outside, neither can it be refined and extracted from its activity in nature. If we follow the thought of the Nature Philosophy, though, a full account of reason would require (at least) an account of the whole of nature. Thus by focusing on the role of reason in the *Weltseele* in only a broad way, I will necessarily give an incomplete account of it, just as the *Weltseele* itself gives an incomplete account. Though outlines are useful, they are only skeletons, unable to hold in any life. Nevertheless, Schelling is willing to describe reason on a general level as a copulative power, able to unite the inorganic and the organic as well as the infinite and the finite (S 2: 361). These unifications are possible because reason itself is the ground of the absolute. What makes possible the union of the finite and infinite is an infinite desire (*Lust*) for self-revelation, or more simply, a self-willing, or still more simply, a self-affirmation. This simplicity of the absolute’s primordial activity should not, however, be taken as evidence of a primordial egocentrism in the absolute or the world-

soul, the expression of the absolute in nature. Rather, the absolute wills all of reality, in all its forms, degrees, and potencies, and the world is the impression (*Abdruck*) of this willing (S 2: 362).

The absolute's self-willing as an urge for identity in spite of difference is manifested in nature in the form of gravity. Gravity is nature's insistence on continual self-presence, on pulling back from expansion into the abyssal, and so is opposed to light-essence (*das Lichtwesen*),³⁹ which struggles against identity to spread itself throughout the whole of nature (S 2: 369). Whereas gravity works externally on things, pulling them toward a longed-for presence, light-essence begins from the all-present center and thrusts outward. And since it begins from absolute presence, this expansive force is completely atemporal.⁴⁰ Unlike gravity, which strives to bring bodies to presence, light-essence strives to bring pure presence into the differentiatedness of matter, to find itself in what is not itself. It is only through this dual movement both toward and away from identity that natural things can appear: "The dark of gravity and the gleam of light-essence first produce [*bringen . . . hervor*] together the beautiful shining of life and complete the thing to what we will call the authentically real [*zu dem eigentlich Realen*]" (S 2: 369).

³⁹Schelling uses this awkward construction to indicate that this basic force of nature is not identical with the shining of light itself, but with the expansive becoming that underlies all shining. It is not the essence or being *of* light, however, because essence only becomes possible through the interaction of light and gravity. It could be said to be the *ground* of light, but this is an underdetermination, since it is also the very becoming of light. Similarly, what Schelling means by gravity is not the attraction of heavy bodies in Newtonian space itself, but that which makes this attraction sensible. In the *Erster Entwurf* he argues that gravity is distinct from the attractive force that Kant makes primary (along with expansive force) in the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (S 3: 264).

⁴⁰Schelling draws a connection between the absolute speed of light-essence and Homer's description of swift movement as the atemporality of thought (S 2: 369). Only thought, which happens outside of time, can approximate the speed of light-essence.

Nature's coming-to-shine, then, is the atemporal happening of the simultaneity of unity in totality (gravity) and totality in unity (light-essence).

Though there are strong correlations between this theory of nature's original differentiation and Schelling's account in *Of the I* of the original differentiation in subjectivity, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* should not be taken as a mere application of idealistic epistemology to nature. The theory of gravity and light-essence is not based on anything like the presumed harmony of nature and intellect found in Kant's exhortation in the third *Critique* that we think nature *as if* it had been created in accord with an intelligible model. Schelling is not arguing that in order for human reason to comprehend nature, nature must have the same repulsive/attractive structure that guides reason; rather, he is arguing that for nature and reason even to be possible, there must be such a structure as to allow for self-showing. In striving to know (*erkennen*) itself, nature at once strives to bring totality into itself and to find itself in totality (S 2: 371).

Nevertheless, although human reason is not the origin of nature's identity, it can be seen as its culmination. Prefiguring his identity philosophy, Schelling claims that human reason presents the strongest convergence of gravity and light (S 2: 377). That is, unity in totality and totality in unity are throughout nature implicitly one and first shine together in the human need to unite the attractive and expansive urges through contemplation. Unlike in the Identity Philosophy, however, this reason is a distinctly human one, one which "bears witness to *our* spirit" (S 2: 377, emphasis mine). Schelling means this not only in the sense that humanity represents the highest development of nature in which its truth at last comes to shine for itself, but also in the sense that reason consists of nothing beyond what nature has developed in humanity. Reason involves

“nothing extra- or supernatural, . . . no bounds are superceded, no limits overcome, because there indeed are no such things” (S 2: 377). Schelling insists that his conception of reason involves no transcendence, for the entire distinction between immanence and transcendence is meaningless in Nature Philosophy. If reason presupposes a knowledge of God, then it does so only through accepting Spinoza’s postulate that the more we know individual things, the more we know God (S 2: 378). Human reason is nothing but nature coming to know itself through a wholly natural (if extremely complex) process of self-organization. Yet the fact that there is nothing beyond nature in the activity of reason does not make it something prosaic or profane. A person who learns to see every individual thing as an expression of God, who realizes that “the violent drive toward determination is undeniably in all metals and stones, in the immeasurable power of which all existence is an expression,” surrenders all hopes to grasp nature through the understanding and “at last enters reason, the holy Sabbath of nature, where she, at peace with her earlier works, recognizes and construes [*erkennt und deutet*] herself as herself” (S 2: 378).

The question Schelling leaves unanswered in the *Weltseele* is how we come to see every natural thing as an expression of God, how the Sabbath is to be observed. If reason is the eternal unity of the finite and infinite and human reason the point at which this unity is brought to self-consciousness (S 2: 360), then how is human reason to be activated? The *Naturphilosophie* needs not only to show the various stages of nature’s evolution, but to explain the necessity of the transitions from one stage of nature to the next.

To judge Schelling's attempt to answer these questions, we will need to look to the 1799 *First Projection of a System of Nature Philosophy*. In the *Erster Entwurf*, Schelling gives his clearest and most systematic account of the whole of Nature Philosophy, greatly expanding his conceptions of activity and inhibition. In the book's second sentence, Schelling gives the theme that will dominate the entire work: "In order for a real activity to come to be out of an infinite (and to that extent ideal) productive activity, that activity must be inhibited [*gehemmt*], retarded [*retardiert*]" (S 3: 5). The movement of the work is to trace the various inhibitions that allow infinite, ideal activity to be transformed into the products of nature. Unlike in the *Ideas* and *Weltseele*, however, Schelling begins not with nature at its most basic level, but instead with organic nature. The reasons for this organizational principle are obscure in the "Outline of the Whole" that serves as the book's introduction, but become clearer as Schelling moves into his investigation of organic nature. Instead of justifying his starting point by reaffirming his hypothesis of the world-soul and asserting that everything is organic, Schelling argues that the organic and inorganic must be distinct in order for the organic to have any sense at all. There are, in a very real sense, both living and dead things—that is, both self-organizing systems and inert bodies that owe their movement to something external. While the former are dependent for their existence on the latter (for of course living bodies are composed of inorganic bodies), the latter are equally dependent on the former, as the absolute can only form itself into bodies without the capacity of self-motion if it limits itself to such bodies. But this means that the inorganic and organic are mutually limiting and hence mutually dependent. Thus it is artificial to follow the example of the *Ideas* and begin with the absolute's limitation into inorganic nature, since

the organic and inorganic must be equiprimordial. Since he must begin with one or the other, Schelling now chooses to begin with the organic, since it more clearly shows the role that inhibition plays in giving nature form at every level.

As the book's second sentence shows, the role of inhibition in general is to limit the infinite activity of the absolute so that it may be formed into products. But here, Schelling assures us, the emphasis is on the activity and only secondarily on the products, for all products are only relatively so. Everything in nature has itself the capacity to be articulated (*zerfallen*) into products (S 3: 5). But since any static conception of this productive activity in itself risks reducing it to a mere product, we can never arrive at an experience [*Erfahrung*] of it, and thus must *postulate* it. As Peterson notes (xiii-xxii), Schelling did not choose the term 'postulate' lightly; it indicates the inseparability of theoretical from practical philosophy by grounding all theoretical knowledge in the activity of a positing self. In contrast to an axiom, which has the strange form of a product not recognized as having been produced by anything, a postulate is always the product of a postulating *activity*. In the "Treatises Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Wissenschaftslehre*," for instance, Schelling argues that the postulates of a science gain their validity from a similarity to moral postulates. A postulate is only held to be valid so long as it can be posited with universal validity (S 1: 416), and thus every postulate can be taken as a formulation of idealism's categorical imperative (see above). Postulation is the beginning of all knowledge, at once a theoretical and a practical act of a free spirit. Nature, therefore, is unanalyzable beyond this foundational postulating activity, which serves as the necessary ground of any rational account of nature.

With this conception of postulation, Schelling revises and complicates the view of the grounding urge of reason we saw in the *Ideas*. At the beginning of the philosophy of nature stands not just a separation, but a *postulate*: a continual act of positing a ground not found in experience, which is nevertheless to be unified with experience. In the *Erster Entwurf* Schelling takes this ground to be construction itself, which, since it is always active, is never reducible to being. As in the *Ideas*, Schelling still contends that this postulate is a separation, but now he notes that this separation responds to more than a mere epistemological urge for measure. The postulation of activity recognizes nature's need to be free: "To philosophize about nature means to lift it out of the dead mechanism to which it appears predisposed, to quicken [*beleben*] it with freedom and to set it into its own free development" (S 3: 13). Schelling's use of the word *beleben* calls to mind the role we saw it play in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. There Kant maintains that a beautiful object (especially in nature) is one that *belebt* the imagination and understanding in such a way that it stimulates a free play of the faculties, which ultimately, in turn, leads one to judge the object *as if* it were created by a divine understanding. Here in the *Erster Entwurf* the relationship is reversed: it is now reason that is being called upon to animate nature. In Section 72 of the third *Critique*, Kant dismisses this possibility as hylozoism: a form of transcendent metaphysics that posits a purpose as existing *really* in nature. Kant scoffs at the suggestion of "an animating inner principle, a world-soul [*ein belebendes inneres Prinzip, eine Weltseele*]" (K 5: 392). The goal of Schelling's Nature Philosophy, on the other hand, is precisely to show the reality and necessity of such a world-soul, even to the extent of making an animal out of matter.

From this grounding urge to establish the essence of nature in its unconditioned activity, philosophy (and again, Schelling here means a philosophy structured by reason) embarks on an infinite striving for the identity of all natural products with this unconditioned activity. This striving of reason is infinite not so much in the sense that completing its task would require an infinite amount of time as in the sense that reason must strive after the idea of infinity in order to adequately account for the freedom of nature. If reason instead sought the identity of finite products with original unconditioned nature, then it would be forced to appeal to an infinite series of intuitions of products, which, as we saw in Kant, the imagination could not encompass. “Therefore,” Schelling concludes, “reason determines either to obliterate the series, or to assume an ideal limit to the series which is so far removed that in practical employment one can never be compelled to go beyond it, as the mathematician does when he assumes an infinitely large or small magnitude” (S 3: 15). If reason obliterates this infinite series, all that remains is a sense of the infinitude of the self. This leaves the self empty of all content and abstracted from all empirical intuitions. In order to represent the infinite becoming-finite of nature, reason must opt for the second option and give a quasi-mathematical account of the origin of nature. Thus the question becomes, how to represent this infinite series? Since the series is postulated to be originally infinite, it cannot be represented as a mere aggregate (*Zusammensetzung*). Instead, it can only be shown in the evolution of the infinite through its infinite encounters with the various inhibitions of nature.

One of Schelling’s favorite examples of natural production through inhibition is a whirlpool: “a stream flows forward in a straight line as long as it encounters no

resistance. Where [there is] resistance—a whirlpool [forms]. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism, for example” (S 3: 18n). The whirlpool is in constant motion, and yet it achieves a certain constancy through nature’s constant activity in opposition to a fixed inhibition. Only when pure activity is inhibited is determination possible. By putting such emphasis on the concept of inhibition, Schelling aims to show that even though in nature *panta rhei*, there are nevertheless fixed natural products. Such fixity must not be seen as a side-effect of activity’s inhibition, but must instead be apprehended in its necessity at every stage of nature’s becoming (S 3: 42). Inhibition is not only relatively necessary in order to allow *natura naturata* to arise from the indeterminacy of *natura naturans*; rather, both inhibition and *natura naturata* must be necessary in themselves if nature is to be explained at all. For in order to conceive of nature as active, we must think of even its inhibitions as activity, albeit activity considered differently. Otherwise, there would be no explanation for inhibition itself. The reasoning here seems similar to the claims in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 and Schelling’s *Vom Ich* that the not-I must have its ground in the I, but from the methodological standpoint there is an important difference. Whereas Fichte and the Fichtean Schelling appeal to the *experience* of positing oneself in order to ground their transcendental idealism, the Schelling of the *Erster Entwurf* appeals to a reason independent of experience in grounding his conception of nature.⁴¹ Schelling does not begin with the observed existence of an infinitely productive nature and ask how it is

⁴¹Fichte was highly critical of this development in Schelling’s philosophy, and it may even be the reason for his replacement of Schelling’s dogmatism/criticism opposition with the opposition between dogmatism and idealism in the “Second Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (Breazeale xxviii). In his 1800 announcement of a new presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte flatly denies the possibility of reason acting in the absence of empirical intuitions (F 7: 158).

possible. Rather, he begins with activity and asks how it could be anything other than activity.

At every stage of nature—that is, when confronting every type of inhibition—nature runs through all possible determinations or shapes (*Gestaltungen*) until one is closed off to it, a process that Schelling calls ‘formation into the infinite’ (*Bildung ins Unendliche*). While this formation is a becoming-free (just as the child’s *Ausbildung* or education is his becoming-free), at every stage nature is bound to its particular *Gestalt* (S 3: 43). Nature as such “contests the individual [*der Natur ist das Individuelle zuwider*]; it longs [*verlangt*] for the absolute and continually endeavors [*bestrebt*] to present [*darstellen*] it” (S 3: 43). Since nature strives to find an equilibrium in which all of its activity is evenly discharged, individual whirlpools “can only be seen as *misbegotten attempts* to achieve such a proportion” (S 3: 43). If such an equilibrium were present, then nature would have produced a permanent product incapable of being split into other products. Yet through the inhibition of sexuality,⁴² nature on the level of the organism splits its formative capacities into the two sexes. Schelling’s reasoning is as follows: if the infinite activity of nature is to be anything other than absolute activity, it must be inhibited. But if it were inhibited to such an extent that only a single inert product were produced, then nature would immediately cancel its own activity and thus have no being at all. Thus organic nature’s first inhibition must be one that inhibits its own activity and yet allows this activity to go on in an infinite, though now determined way. Such an

⁴²Sexuality appears rather suddenly on the scene of the *Erster Entwurf* without sufficient explanation of why it must be nature’s first inhibition. Here we see the impasse which Schelling ultimately came to see as unavoidable for the nature philosophy: while nature philosophy can show how inhibitions give shape to the absolute, it cannot show why inhibition comes to be in the first place.

inhibition is sexuality, which inhibits the constant reproduction of the asexual organism but nevertheless allows nature to reproduce itself continuously. In a sense, the asexual organism is not an organism at all, since no inhibition has determined it as an individual.⁴³ It is merely a moment in nature's continual reproduction.

Here we see the importance of Schelling's choice of the word *Bildung* to indicate organic nature's formative drive. *Bildung*, literally an image-ing, denotes formation in a very broad sense, and has the senses of shaping, education, (normative) culture, and even acquisition. Given Schelling's lifelong flirtation with Spinozism, we also should not forget that God's shaping of nature can also be called an act of *Bildung*. In the *Erster Entwurf* Schelling suggests that in organic nature *Bildung* is simultaneously the sexual and the technical drive (S 3: 44-5). In insects these drives are split, so that every individual participates in only one or the other. The separation of sexes is shown to be a true inhibition because it gives distinct shape (*Gestalt*) to the plant and animal realms by preventing nature from dissolving into complete non-individuality. If the formative drive were not checked by sexuality, the individual organism would not be an *object* [*Objekt*], but instead an *instrument* of nature's activity. While nature always aims to cancel out the individuality of the organism through the continual formation of life, sexual differentiation paradoxically forces it to rely on individuals to do so.

⁴³To further the point in the previous footnote, it does seem that there is a relevant inhibition here, which would mean that sexuality is not organic nature's first inhibition. To take a bacterium as an example (and if one wanted to avoid anachronistic empirical criticisms, a similar point could be made with ferns and other asexual multicellular organisms), it seems that the cell membrane does provide an inhibition to nature's continual reproduction in the organism. Only that which can pass through the cell membrane can be incorporated into the organism's productivity, which would imply that the bacterium is, after all an individual. Similar cases could perhaps even be made for individual free-floating nucleic acids, which would further push back the question of nature's first inhibition.

Thus the formative drive (*Bildungstrieb*) unites freedom and necessity in the individual. The individual is not bound to any mechanical laws of productivity, but instead raises itself to a whole, actively differentiating itself from its external world and reproducing this differentiation. And yet, this drive also imposes necessity on the individual, for it is compelled to reproduce itself and cannot reproduce anything other than itself (S 3: 61n). For this reason, Schelling wants to distinguish the formative drive from a formative force (*bildende Kraft*) (S 3: 61n).⁴⁴ In contrast to a force, a drive is always complex and always striving for a return to self. Or, what is the same, whereas a force has no object and thus projects into infinity, a drive makes itself its object and thus is capable of rest (S 3: 152n). In the immediate context, Schelling is arguing that it is necessary for the formative drive to separate into sexes in order to fulfill itself, but Schelling also asserts on a wider level that “dualism is the condition of all of nature’s activity” (S 3: 62n). Activity could not exist if it did not have to struggle against separation. Thus activity must presuppose a division between inner and outer and always “works from the inner toward the outer” (S 3: 70). As manifested on the level of the individual organism, this separation, Schelling tells us, functions roughly in harmony with John Brown’s conception of excitability⁴⁵ (*Erregbarkeit* in Schelling’s German), which Schelling takes up primarily through Kielmeyer. According to this conception, what is proper to the organic world is a mutual determination of an organism’s receptivity (*Empfänglichkeit*) and its activity (S 3: 70). While an organism’s activity is inhibited by its surrounding world, this is only the case because its activity allows the surrounding

⁴⁴Schelling first introduces this distinction in *Von der Weltseele* (S 2: 566).

⁴⁵Though Schelling praises Brown for being the first to produce a theory of life that is neither vitalistic nor mechanistic, he claims that Brown failed to deduce this theory systematically, but merely stumbled into it through “a lucky grasp” (S 3: 91n).

world to affect it. This is true even of threats to the organism. For example, a poison is only a poison to the extent that an active organism attempts to incorporate it into itself; or rather, “poison does not attack the body, but the body attacks the poison” (S 3: 72).

Yet the reverse is equally true: an organism’s activity is also conditioned by its receptivity, for otherwise it would have already expanded its inner world throughout the outer. Thus Schelling defines excitability as the “indirect affectability (*Afficirbarkeit*) of an organism” (S 3: 83n). Opium may excite a body, but it does so only through the body’s own activity (through blood flow, neurological processes, etc.). In other words, excitability is the polemic co-presence of activity and receptivity in every organism. Schelling’s system of nature philosophy thus combines the subjectivity of vitalism with the objectivity of a biochemical theory of life (S 3: 90n). Whereas vitalism sees life only in its activity and chemistry only in its receptivity, the nature philosophy realizes that neither of these is conceivable without the other.

Against this conception of organic nature Schelling opposes a Lamarckian “assumption that different organisms have really formed [*gebildet*] themselves from one another through gradual development” (S 3: 63). Schelling criticizes this view not as irrational but as a misuse of reason. Under the misguided evolutionary conception, nature is a unified product because it has developed according to an original archetype. But if reason leads us to posit the identity of all nature too easily—that is, if we ignore the role of inhibition in suspending nature’s self-identity—then we will have to conclude that this original archetype could only have been the absolute. But then we would be left with the same problem with which we began: an explanation for the emanation of species from the original archetype. It is not enough to show a continuity in the anatomy or even

the physiology of organisms of various species, for this proves nothing with respect to the identity of all nature. Not only does it not prove that nature is a single, self-identical product, but it does not even show how nature *could* be such a product. Identity cannot be conceived through the continuity of forces, but instead arises from a centripetal drive for return-to-self. Indeed, for the physicist who seeks only continuity in nature, it is disingenuous to speak of nature as a product, for production only makes sense if activity is inhibited. The physicist's emphasis on forces fails to portray both nature's infinite activity and its formation through inhibition. Though Schelling argues that nature can only be thought in its activity by showing its evolution from an undetermined absolute, this evolution cannot be understood by looking for evidence of continuity in nature. Rather, organic nature's evolution can only be understood as the striving to overcome inhibitions.⁴⁶

As such, all activity in nature can take place only "on the border of two worlds" (S 3: 147n): namely, on the border between the organic and the inorganic, between dead and self-organizing matter. And if the organism is the site of this border, then the organism must itself be a dyad containing both the inorganic world of inert bodies⁴⁷ and the self-organizing principle of life. In this latter, higher principle, the organism is no

⁴⁶None of this means, however, that Schelling is dismissive of efforts to find evolutionary continuity in nature. Indeed, he calls for an empirical study of "natural history" to supplement his own project, the *system* of nature philosophy (S 3: 68). Whereas system must be guided by reason's drive to unity, the understanding's search for continuity is perfectly suitable for natural history.

⁴⁷In the Second Division of the *Erster Entwurf* Schelling gives his account of inorganic nature, which, as we have seen, is equally as essential as the account of organic nature. Because this account is similar (though far from identical) to the account in the *Ideas* and because it has less to offer to Schelling's concept of reason, I have omitted a discussion of this section and moved straight to the Third Division. Nevertheless, these discussions set the stage for Schelling's fascinating (if bewildering) discussion in the Third Division of the parallels in the structures of organic and inorganic nature.

longer a part of nature, but has removed itself, or better has been “removed [*hinweggenommen*] from nature and raised to a higher potency” (S 3: 154n). Yet since this higher principle has been removed from nature, it cannot be observed therein. Thus there must be in all life a principle that explains the possibility of separation and hence excitability that nevertheless cannot be observed in life. Schelling’s name for this principle (following Brown) is sensibility (*Sensibilität*). Sensibility can never be observed in another organism, but is known only to a subject that already knows itself to be identical with organic nature. Thus sensibility is possible only to the extent that an organism makes itself its own object (S 3: 159).

In order that the objective organism not be made into a dead product, the organism has to allow for itself to be continually disturbed and yet remain self-same—a capacity that Schelling (again following Brown) calls irritability (*Irritibilität*). Irritability is accordingly an organism’s ability to continuously produce a state of indifference to those objects that must make a difference to it as a sensible being (S 3: 170). Sensibility and irritability are mutually determining in that sensibility requires a relative equilibrium in order to sense something opposed to the organism and irritability requires a disturbance in order to return to equilibrium. This duality is manifested in the organism as a continual expansion and contraction, with the organism alternately contracting to take the external world into itself—which Schelling gives the generic name intussusception to indicate that it includes more than just nutrition⁴⁸—and expanding to expel this world from itself.

⁴⁸According to Schelling’s theory, the ultimate purpose of nutrition is neither to replace body parts lost through friction nor to provide fuel for the body’s chemical processes, but instead to provide a constant source of internal difference. To the friction theory

Though reason will lead us to this opposition of expansion and contraction, the understanding will lead us to see a continuity across the various organic forces. After showing how the activity of organisms cannot be conceived without opposed drives, Schelling traces how “one and the same force fades from sensibility into irritability, from there into the force of reproduction, and from this (under a certain condition) into the technical drive [*Kunsttrieb*]” (S 3: 180-1). Each is in its own way an expression of the formative drive. While an analysis of the various potencies of organisms in terms of forces can yield scientifically relevant conclusions, the analysis of reason as a force continuous with these potencies will inevitably fail. The technical products of bees and other animals do indeed show a purposiveness and are in their own way perfect, but they do not exhibit reason any more than the elegant orbits of the planets (S 3: 181). It is misleading to say that bees and the like demonstrate a primitive form of reason “because reason is simply one, because it does not admit of degrees, and because it is the absolute itself” (S 3: 182). To say that technical beings are rational is to say that they are absolute, which assumes that they are capable of intuiting themselves and absolving themselves of all relations to nature.

Schelling thus rejects *On the World-Soul*'s simple identification of reason and nature's activity and reinstalls reason as an absolute freedom independent of all nature. He accordingly calls into question the scientific importance of claims (including his own)

Schelling provides the counterexample of plants, which move very little but nevertheless require nutrition. The fuel theory, on the other hand, assumes that life is an essentially chemical process, which would fail to explain the possibility of activity in organic nature (S 3: 172). Of course, organisms are composed of chemicals, for otherwise they would no longer be a part of nature. But insofar as organisms pull themselves out of nature, they are also more than mere amalgamations of chemicals. Nutrition is merely one form of intussusception, and as such its main function is to stimulate the organism to contract in on itself and strive to overcome its own internal differences.

that nature is sleeping or inchoate rationality. While it is tempting to say that nature is the cancellation of the duplicity of spirit, since nature knows nothing of this duplicity it is rather the case that spirit is the cancellation of nature's identity (S 3: 182). Echoing Kant in the third *Critique*, Schelling asserts that the positing of intelligence in nature is merely the projection of human intelligence: "And thus you see your own understanding in nature, so it seems to you to produce *for you*. And you are only right to see in its lawful productions an analogue of freedom, *because even unconditioned necessity becomes freedom again*" (S 3: 186). As such, even though it is possible to note a great deal of continuity between the forces of nature, such a focus on forces can never grasp how nature could give rise to itself. Only a reason that strives for a return to itself in the face of inhibitions can appreciate the freedom of nature.

Yet in the *First Projection* even reason cannot accomplish all that Schelling wishes. In addition to the empirical difficulties that Schelling admits have yet to be resolved (for example, an adequate account of the origin of magnetism and its parallels with sensibility), there is also the fundamental problem of the origin of inhibition. Just as Fichte cannot explain *why* (certain) people are able to posit an I and an opposing not-I, Schelling here fails to show what gives rise to the first duality in nature (S 3: 220). By the Third Division, Schelling has replaced his inquiries into the first inhibition of organic nature with inquiries into the first inhibition of nature in general. He can offer no explanations for how the pure activity of the absolute is forced into the determinate form of mechanical motion, a gap that will lead Schelling to conclude that Nature Philosophy is inherently incomplete and must be supplemented with a method of transcendental

idealism that advances from the simplicity of pure consciousness to the full complexity of nature.

But near the end of the *First Projection*, Schelling abruptly introduces a new problem that will take him at least until 1809 to solve, at the expense not only of the categories of the understanding, but of reason itself. As if to underscore its unsettled place in the *Erster Entwurf*, Schelling confronts the concept and phenomenon of disease in an appendix to Chapter 3 of the Third Division, in which he had laid out the continuity of the various organic drives and showed their analogues in inorganic nature.⁴⁹ All of these drives must remain susceptible to disease, as, indeed, must all of life. Disease cannot simply be dismissed as an exception to nature's laws or as anti-natural, for "If disease is a state counter to nature, then so is life—and admittedly it is unnatural to the extent that life is really a state extorted (*abgezwungener*) from nature, not favored by nature, but a state enduring against nature's will . . . life is a continual sickness, and death only the recovery from life" (S 3: 222 n2). Thus before he can explain sickness, Schelling must explain how death is possible. Normally, an organism's receptivity decreases as its activity increases and vice-versa. This inverse relationship also holds between the organic drives, so that an organism's sensibility decreases as its irritability increases and vice versa. For example, when an organism is exposed to a non-lethal dose of poison, its sensibility (or receptivity) may surge and its irritability (or activity) fall.

⁴⁹In the *Sämtliche Werke* edition of Schelling's works, Schelling's son Karl notes Schelling had inserted the chapter on disease slightly earlier in his lectures on the book, but he gives no indication why (S 3: 205n1). Krell suggests that Schelling perhaps should have placed the section far earlier, as disease is at issue almost from the beginning of the *Erster Entwurf* (Krell 100). At any rate, Schelling clearly could not find a satisfactory place in the *First Projection* for a consideration of disease, as it calls the entire project of *Naturphilosophie* into question.

But when an organism dies, both sensibility and irritability, both receptivity and activity, diminish simultaneously: the organism loses both its ability to incorporate external stimuli and its power to maintain the equilibrium of its activity. Thus sensibility and irritability must be inversely proportional only above a certain limit, below which they decrease proportionately until life fades away entirely (§ 3: 233).

Disease, as opposed to death, always works within the inverse relationship of sensibility and irritability. By drastically stimulating one of the organic drives, it drastically compromises the other. But if we are to avoid a mechanistic account of life, we cannot take disease as a pathogen external to these drives, but as a disproportion in the drives themselves. Accordingly, physicians are wrong to identify diseases with their physical symptoms (by claiming, for instance, that disease is identical with a disproportion in the humors), since these symptoms are only effects of the higher organic drives. While the stimulus can disrupt the irritability in the organism, it can do so only through the activity of the organism itself.

Yet even with these qualifications, Schelling still fails to show how organisms are vulnerable to disease. As active natural beings, organisms are constantly organizing themselves in response to external inhibitions. Through the nutritive and other drives, organisms seek out diversity, which they then bring into proportion with the rest of the organism. If disease is not something external to the organism, then it is itself an organizational principle. But this would imply that disease itself is more alive than life and that the disease is more of a subject than the organism it infects. Just as the organism becomes an individual by opposing itself to nature through the sexual inhibition of the formative drive, the disease would seem to become an even more developed individual

by withdrawing itself from the proportionality of the organism's formative drives. In one sense, this conclusion is compelling, since the disease is an outgrowth of the organism's activity and yet constantly strives to assert its independence of it just as an individual organism does in relation to nature. The fact that disease works counter to the organism's activity poses no conceptual problems, since the organism is a similar inhibition of nature's reproductive activity. Yet if disease is to organism as organism is to nature, then the striving of a disease should be more determinate than that of the individual organism. Where nature strives simply to reproduce itself, the individual organism strives for sexual maturity, sexual intercourse, technical production, and so on. Disease, on the other hand—and recall that we are not speaking of pathogenic organisms, but of disease as a specific capacity or possibility of the organism—has no such determinacy of purpose, and it is questionable whether it even has nature's goal of self-reproduction.

The *Erster Entwurf* does not, however, end with an acceptance of defeat in the face of disease, but instead with a reflection on the conceptual possibility of differentiation in nature. As he had in the *Ideas*, Schelling reaffirms that difference is only intelligible on the basis of identity and identity on the basis of difference, but now he adds physical content to this law of identity: "Unity in diremption only exists where the heterogeneous attracts, and diremption in unity only where the homogeneous repels" (S 3: 250-1). Thus the condition of all diversity in nature is the separation of an absolutely self-identical nature, but this nature's self-identity itself presupposes a duality. This can only be possible if the original homo/heterogeneity of absolute nature is a matter of indifference. In the inorganic realm, such indifference is seen in pre-magnetized earth. Rocks can be split apart and forced back together, and their homo/heterogeneity is a

matter of indifference until one rock becomes magnetized. In the same way, inorganic nature is indifferent with respect to life until one collection of bodies becomes sensible. How to cope with nature's original indifference to life, and hence to reason, is a problem with which Schelling and Hegel will continually contend through 1809 and beyond.

Chapter 3: Speculative Reason

“But in every feeling a contradiction is felt, and nothing whatever can be felt save an inner contradiction within ourselves.” (S 3: 560)

“What would this be, philosophizing without intuition? One would disperse oneself endlessly in absolute finitudes.” (H 4: 28)

“Just as speech is by rhythm, science is supported and guided by dialectic.” (S *Nachlass* 2: 20)

Stepping back from the fissure of indifference opened in the Nature Philosophy, Schelling’s next major work brings difference and contradiction into the heart of post-Kantian philosophy. Rather than striving (as in the *Wissenschaftslehre*) to overcome the opposition between the I and not-I, the *System of Transcendental Idealism* embraces the oppositions of man and nature, subject and object, insisting that reason comes to know itself by preserving, not overcoming its other. The concept of reason developed in the *System* and Hegel’s companion piece on the *Difference between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy* is a thoroughly human one, which provisionally opposes reason to intuition, only to show that intuition is not only compatible with, but the very life of, human reason. As the two epigraphs above show, intuition is simultaneously the contradiction that pushes reason to enlarge itself and the very ability to preserve contradictions in a greater whole. Intuition in these texts is the name for the movement of difference within human reason, the heightening and suspension of contradiction that raises reason beyond the forces of organic life and beyond the limits of a systematic⁵⁰ philosophical presentation. But by following reason beyond the limits of

⁵⁰Though it has greatly influenced my readings of Schelling and the German idealists in general, for reasons of simplicity I have elected not to preserve Heidegger’s distinction between the German idealists’ “systems” of philosophy and the “systematic” philosophy that must follow the dissolution of their collapse (Heidegger 42: 51). According to my

system, these two texts also dissolve the concept of humanity as the locus for the resolution of contradictions. The all-too-human “feelings” that give these texts so much vitality lose their place in an absolute that exceeds all philosophical presentation.

The *System of Transcendental Idealism* proved to be the first in a long line of works, stretching at least until 1829, that Schelling would title “systems.” We should not take this newfound titular bravado lightly, as Schelling, though never shy about the relative worth of his contributions to philosophy, had used such phrases as “ideas toward . . .” and “first projection of . . .” to indicate the provisionalness of his previous works. Seeing the incompleteness of the nature philosophy, Schelling announces in the first few pages of his new *System* that he intends to “enlarge Transcendental Idealism into what it really should be, namely a system of all knowledge” (S 3: 330). There is no place for modesty in philosophy, as philosophical problems do not sit neutrally, as if indifferent to our advances, but demand that we confront and solve them. Remaining silent in the face of the unknown is a symptom of slavishness and irresponsibility rather than piety. Yet Schelling is clear that by highlighting the need for system he is not renouncing the Nature Philosophy, but showing the need to develop a parallel philosophy in which the I raises itself to consciousness (S 3: 331). Schelling likens this method to Descartes’s, when the Frenchman boasted that from only matter and motion he could fashion the universe.⁵¹ Analogously, Schelling promises: “give me a nature made up of opposed activities, of which one reaches out into the infinite, while the other tries to intuit itself in this infinitude, and from that I will make the intelligence, with the whole system of its

usage, a text is systematic not necessarily because it recognizes the finitude of metaphysics and thus aims to present the inner jointure of beings, but simply if it is or strives to be a system.

⁵¹*The World*, Chapter 6 (Descartes 35).

presentations, arise before you” (S 3: 427). But the difference between transcendental idealism and Descartes’s physics is that the latter assumes a pre-given intelligence while the former strives to produce its own conditions of intelligibility (S 3: 427). Like Hegel’s “spirit,” Schelling’s “intelligence” is to be a self-developing and -defining subject-object that comes to know itself in knowing the world. This radical methodological presumption entails, according to Schelling, that a system of transcendental idealism must deduce not only the physical world, but the very possibility of understanding and deducing it.

Thus Schelling calls for a new mode of presenting philosophical insights, one that mirrors the development of the intellect in its very form. Crucial to his early understanding of system is that the presentation of the system stands outside the movement of consciousness and is thus a form of memory (S 3: 331). The presentation of the *System* is the narration of the history of self-consciousness, in which every reference to concrete experience “serves as a memorial and a document” for the pre-conscious systematic movement that makes all thought possible (S 3: 331). Indeed, Schelling’s transcendental philosophy begins with the “free imitation [*Nachahmung*]” of the original act of self-consciousness and at every stage of its presentation merely reproduces the freedom of this original act (S 3: 396). Yet Schelling is uneasy with this structure of remembrance, for it seems at odds with his ideal of system according to which form and content are not only inseparable but identical. In a true system, philosophical presentation should not only mirror the structure of reality, but be one with it (Cf. Heidegger 42: 109). In 1804 Schelling will for this reason declare the dialogue, which presents philosophical insights as they emerge, the only adequate form of

philosophical presentation (S 6: 13).⁵² Yet the works to which Schelling most frequently refers (in his 1827 *Lectures on the History of Recent Philosophy* and elsewhere) are the *Ideas*, the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, the *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* and the *Freiheitsschrift*—none of them dialogues. So we should not dismiss the forms of Schelling’s non-dialogues, particularly in light of the fact that Schelling claims it is in form, not content, that the *System of Transcendental Idealism* represents an improvement over his previous writings. He assures his readers that the *STI* presents no new content; it merely presents the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the *Naturphilosophie* in a form more adequate to this content (S 3: 330-1). Both Fichte and the earlier Schelling had argued, albeit somewhat opaquely, that “nature’s highest goal, to become wholly an object to itself, is achieved only through the highest and last reflection, which is none other than man; or, more generally, it is what we call reason, in which nature first completely returns to itself, and by which it becomes apparent that nature is identical from the first with what we recognize in ourselves as the intelligent and the conscious” (S 3: 341). And yet, by divorcing the reason guiding nature from the reason guiding the philosopher, the nature philosophy was forced to give a one-sided portrayal of nature’s development. Fichte’s system likewise lacked completion because it failed to show the development of its own reason, merely positing a finite I without proving the possibility of such.

Thus the task of the *System* (and of system in general) is to present the very freedom that all philosophy presupposes. In this respect, Schelling fails to complete his task, for while the philosopher can replicate the original freedom of self-consciousness,

⁵²The ambivalence of this position can be seen in the fact that the work in which Schelling makes this declaration, *Philosophy and Religion*, is not itself a dialogue.

she cannot absolve herself of all of the dependencies that this freedom precedes.

Although all philosophical activity occurs within time and thus must be accounted for in nature's sequence of necessary events, free beings still have the capacity to interrupt their sequence of presentations and freely reflect on their own freedom. This act of reflection replaces a necessary sequence of presentations with a free imitation of this sequence (S 3: 397). Philosophical reflection is thus, in a sense that Schelling fails to develop, outside of time.⁵³ Thus the *System of Transcendental Idealism* distinguishes itself from all previous systems by making freedom, not being, primary (S 3: 376). According to Schelling, any system that begins with being rather than freedom will have to make freedom merely illusory, since freedom always exceeds any ground in being. So long as we begin with being, God, or nature, we are left with a Spinozism that will seek to show how apparently free acts are grounded in, and thus determined by, some prior being.⁵⁴ In contrast, "Being in [the *System of Transcendental Idealism*] is merely *freedom suspended [die Aufgehobene Freiheit]*" (S 3: 376). That is, transcendental philosophy never loses sight of its origin in the intuitive act of an atemporal self-consciousness. It takes no object of consciousness as absolute, but recognizes each as dependent on the positing of a free self. Being is thus the eternally changing product of a free and active self-

⁵³Showing how freedom can exist outside of time is one of the major tasks of the *Freedom* essay (S 7: 385 ff.) and was vital for the argument of Kierkegaard's *Concept of Anxiety*. In both cases, the importance of space reemerges as the determinacy of time is suspended (cf. Kierkegaard 85). For an excellent discussion of the relation of Kierkegaard's concept of time to Hegel's system, see Hühn 133 ff.

⁵⁴This is a proposition that Schelling will seek to disprove in the *Freiheitsschrift*, where he will argue that being and freedom can be equally primordial so long as being is not seen as the ground of freedom. Schelling will thus deny the connection he draws in the *System* between grounding and determining.

consciousness. (S 3: 376). Only with this recognition is it possible to develop a true system: a presentation of the ground of all knowledge, including itself.

And yet, from the very beginning Schelling tells us that the *System of Transcendental Idealism* cannot be a system in this sense, for Transcendental Philosophy must be supplemented with the Nature Philosophy Schelling has already developed (S 3: 342). The task of philosophy is inevitably dual: to show the development of reason both through nature and through subjectivity. Schelling thus revises Fichte's basic division of philosophy into its practical and theoretical sides. Recall that for Fichte, theoretical reason is reason that seeks to explain the freedom of the I on the basis of the not-I and practical reason the willful establishment of freedom as prior to objectivity. Thus while theoretical reason must precede practical reason in philosophical presentation, practical reason has ontological priority, since theoretical reason can only be exercised by an intelligence free to posit what it chooses. In Chapter 2, we saw Schelling's nature philosophy reject Fichte's prioritization of practical reason for its refusal to question the grounds of the finite I. An I that imposes its will on nature without coming to terms with its indebtedness thereto is despotic, merely the enforcer of arbitrary commands. But, as we saw in the "Treatises Explicatory of the Idealism in the *Wissenschaftslehre*," Schelling also rejects Fichte's claims about the task of theoretical philosophy. Having assumed reason to be identical with all reality, Schelling can no longer pretend that reason must search for its ground in something other than itself. Thus the task of philosophy is bidirectional, just as Fichte claimed, but now reason is not just a twofold technique by which the individual arrives at knowledge, but the source of knowledge itself. In Nature Philosophy, absolute reason inhibits its own infinite activity until it

comes to know itself, and in Transcendental Philosophy, finite reason expands its self-intuition until it knows itself to be identical with the absolute.⁵⁵ Since both sides of philosophical science show the possibility of absolute self-knowledge, “it is therefore indifferent, from a purely theoretical standpoint, whether the objective or the subjective be made primary, since this is a matter that practical philosophy (though it has no voice in this connection) is alone able to decide” (S 3: 332). With this subjugation of the theoretical to the practical, Schelling throws the *System* into disarray before he has even begun laying out the history of self-consciousness. A system of transcendental idealism, which is to bring the insights of Kant and Fichte to completion, is to be but one half of philosophical science, whose other half is nature philosophy. Yet the two halves do not make the whole of philosophy, for each must be preceded by a practical philosophy, which nevertheless has no voice in their respective development.

The book’s exoskeleton gives little help in clearing up the structure of Schelling’s philosophy as a whole, as its organization into six parts seems almost arbitrary. Following a Forward and Introduction, Part One is a restatement of Schelling’s earlier arguments for making the I the principle of all knowledge, and Part Two is a restatement of the Fichtean derivation of the same principle. Frustratingly, Schelling ends Part Two by reaffirming the same Fichtean division of philosophy into mutually necessary practical and theoretical sides that he criticizes in the Forward (S 3: 387). Part Three comprises roughly half of the *System* and lays out the movement from the first act of self-consciousness to the absolute act of the will. Though Schelling titles this part the

⁵⁵Schelling tentatively identifies nature philosophy with theoretical reason and transcendental philosophy with practical reason (S 3: 332), but this identification soon dissolves, as the first three parts of the *System of Transcendental Idealism* are devoted solely to theoretical philosophy.

“System of Theoretical Philosophy According to the Principles of Transcendental Idealism,” the last few sections on the will and postulation clearly invoke a practical philosophy. Part Four, in which Schelling claims to develop a “System of Practical Philosophy According to the Principles of Transcendental Idealism,” gives little indication of its own relation to the theoretical side of philosophy, but its title (along with that of Part Three) seems to indicate that Transcendental Idealism consists of *two* systems, leaving the reader to wonder whether these should be set in opposition to nature philosophy or somehow include it. Part Five, which shows the necessity of a teleological account of nature for the completion of practical philosophy, is a mere four pages long, but it sets up the book’s final part, which seeks to give a philosophical account of the artwork, which, Schelling argues, stands outside of the system of philosophy entirely. Thus the book is hardly a system in Schelling’s desired sense of providing a unitary ground to all knowledge (including its own presentation), as it fails even to show what such a unitary ground would look like and concedes, at any rate, that it would be extra-philosophical. But it would be too quick to infer that Schelling’s transcendental philosophy is therefore a failure. By structuring itself around the I’s coming to know itself through increasing determination, the *System* legitimizes its own place as a transitional work in the development toward absolute knowledge, rather than the systematic culmination of idealistic thought.

This legitimization of asystematic thought appears at the very beginning of Schelling’s discussion of theoretical philosophy. To maintain his distance from Fichte, Schelling carefully distinguishes the I with which his Transcendental Idealism begins from the I of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. Philosophy does not begin with an act of will,

whereby a conscious subject raises itself above its empirical conditions, but with what Schelling calls self-consciousness, “an act [*Akt*] lying outside time, and by which all time is first constituted” (S 3: 375). Whereas in ordinary consciousness I am aware of a variety of presentations or objects, I am not simultaneously aware of myself as the origin of these presentations (S 3: 366-7). In contrast, self-consciousness (or pure consciousness, as Schelling sometimes calls it) contains no empirical content, but consists solely in the intellectual intuition that *I am* (S 3: 367). Contrary to the later complaints of Hegel⁵⁶ and others, the hypothesis of an intellectual intuition is not Schelling’s way of asserting the truth of idealism without proof, but the name for a logically complex account of what self-positing involves. Before the I can recognize itself as existing, it must already have made itself into an object for itself. But something is only an object to the extent that it, unlike free subjectivity, is limited. But this means that self-consciousness is unlimited self-limiting: self-consciousness is characterized by an oscillating activity (*schwebende Tätigkeit*) between limiting and being limited (S 3: 391).

If the I were nothing but such oscillation, no determinate consciousness could arise. A sensuous, reflective being is something far more determined than an interplay of freedom and unfreedom. In order to advance from pure, infinite limitation to consciousness of an external world, the I must (pre-reflectively) seize upon this oscillation as itself something determinate. Thus the first stage of the I’s becoming conscious of its absoluteness is realizing its own limitation. By doing so, the I posits its

⁵⁶“What the form of intellectual intuition concerns has already been discussed; there is nothing more convenient than this cognition for positing immediate knowledge of whatever comes to mind” (HV 9: 180).

activity as arising in part from beyond itself (that is, from what limits it), which is to say that it senses an external world (S 3: 404). As we transcendental philosophers reflect on this development, we perform an analogous activity, recognizing the impossibility of our own thought without a necessity independent of ourselves. We philosophers realize that “the truth of all cognition undoubtedly rests on the feeling of compulsion which accompanies it” (S 3: 408). In seeking to make sense of this external compulsion, we are forced to admit that we cannot recount all the unconscious activity that precedes consciousness and makes it possible, and thus we fixate on certain recognizable epochs in the history of consciousness (S 3: 390). Just as we can in the Nature Philosophy discern eddies and whirlpools in nature’s flow, in recalling the history of self-consciousness, we are able to find analogous continually renewing unconscious constructs.

But at this stage, consciousness only intuits its limitation without being able to explain it. Because it recognizes a distinction between its intuitions and the limitations that compel them, it assumes that they arise in part from outside consciousness. This shows the inevitable failure of any “Dogmatic Transcendent⁵⁷ Idealism” that ignores the real limits of the self and presumes that it can deduce intuitions from mere concepts. Though consciousness will ultimately realize that it shares a ground with its intuitions and is thus originally identical with them, it can only do so by first recognizing an absolute and external necessity in intuition. Dogmatic Transcendent Idealism mistakes the necessity of consciousness’s determination in general (which Schelling calls its first

⁵⁷Schelling does not explain what he means by “transcendent,” but by reaffirming that his is a *transcendental* idealism in the next sentence, he recalls Kant’s distinction in the first *Critique* between transcendent and transcendental uses of reason (A296/B352-3). We can thus infer that a “dogmatic transcendent idealism” is one that takes itself to have knowledge beyond the limits of pure reason.

limitation) for the contingent particular determinations that individual self-consciousnesses face (which he calls the second limitation). While it is absolutely necessary that thought contain limitations, the central problem of theoretical philosophy is to show why it contains the precise limitations it does (S 3: 410). The particular limitations faced by any self-consciousness are contingent on its location in absolute space, its relations to other subjects, and so on. Yet the inexplicability of the second limitation is a flaw of our knowledge, not of the system. If we knew the precise condition of every part of our solar system, for instance, we could deduce all the limitations on any given intelligence (S 3: 410). The *System of Transcendental Idealism* is thus predetermined, but not in such a way that denies freedom. For while the determination of the intellect is prior to any conscious willing, it is not necessarily prior to all the self's activity. Schelling leaves open the possibility (though he will not explore it systematically until the 1809 *Freedom* essay) that the first limitation is an entirely free act of an unconscious and impersonal I, from which all determination follows necessarily.

Following its first and second limitations, the consciousness of the sensuous I consists of a variety of presentations, some of which arise by its own free activity and some by sensation. In order to overcome the oscillation between the two, it posits a self which is capable of intuiting both sensuous externality and itself. The I thus becomes a perceiving being, capable of sensing and being sensed. It soon realizes that in order to be capable of both sensing and being sensed, it must in some way be in control of the act of sensing. Consciousness thus sees itself as productive of intuitions, as able to overstep external limitation (*über die Grenze hinausgehen*) and determine whether the self or something external is to be limited (S 3: 419). Once again, consciousness fixes on an

oscillation between spontaneity and limitation and becomes aware of the determination underlying it.⁵⁸ The theoretical side of Transcendental Idealism thus consists of three major acts of self-realization:

In the first, the still unconscious act of self-awareness, the I was a subject-object, without being so for itself. In the second, the act of sensation, only its objective activity became an object to it. In the third, that of productive intuition, it became an object to itself as sensing, that is, as a subject. (S 3: 534)

Under the heading of productive intuition, Schelling rushes through a great deal of territory, including the highlights of his nature philosophy. In order to make sense of its own sensing, the I posits forces, then matter, then organic matter. In retracing this ground, Schelling undermines his sharp division in the Preface between Transcendental and Nature Philosophy. If we can account for the whole of nature through the unconscious I's self-revelation, it is unclear why there must be a separate science for the unfolding of the absolute into various natural products. If Transcendental Idealism is really as powerful as Schelling implies, then it would seem that the *Naturphilosophie's* critique of Fichte was misguided: one need not show the development of nature through inhibition of the absolute, but merely through expansion of the I. Thus the sole problem with Fichte's system would be that he fails to account for the externality of the I's second limitation, and thus does not fully appreciate the finitude of the I.

But it would seem that Schelling's instincts in separating Transcendental from Nature Philosophy are correct, even if he fails to carry this separation through the whole of the *STI*. For Schelling admits that the nature posited by the productive intuition is

⁵⁸Consciousness will repeat this process, overcoming its oscillation between expansion into the not I and contraction back into the I by positing matter, the oscillation between cause and effect by positing the organic, and so on, all of which actions comprise what Schelling calls "productive intuition."

actually a “second nature” reconstructed by consciousness, but not necessarily identical with its unconscious sources (S 3: 537). In expanding its self-conception to include matter, forces, and organisms, the I is telling its own history, but it is not thereby becoming that history. Expansion on the merely theoretical level is a mere prelude to the conscious intuition of oneself as free subject-object. Schelling calls this process of expansion the “synthetic method,” though in his 1827 *Lectures on Recent Philosophy* he will identify it with the Hegelian dialectic to ensure that his listeners would not falsely attribute its discovery to Hegel (S 10: 96-7).⁵⁹ Whatever its name, Schelling makes clear that synthetic expansion is always an act and is thus from its very beginning practical: “Two opposites *a* and *b* (subject and object) are united by the act *x*, but *x* contains a new opposition, *c* and *d* (sensing and sensed) and so the act *x* itself again becomes an object; it is itself explicable only through a new act = *z*, which perhaps again contains an opposition, and so on” (S 3: 412). As in the dialectic Hegel describes in the *Science of Logic* (greater *Logic*, 54), the I expands its self-conception to overcome a conflict in its previous conception, only to see a new conflict emerge. One crucial difference between the synthetic method and the Hegelian dialectic, however, is that Schelling denies that at its ground (self-)knowledge is mediated by concepts. As in his previous works, Schelling remains insistent that concepts, as mere products of the understanding, must be grounded in prior intuitions (S 3: 427). In every act of intuition, concept and object are one. A concept is “what arises for us, when we separate the acting (*Handeln*) as such from the outcome” (S 3: 506). Since this separation can only occur in consciousness, any

⁵⁹Six years earlier, in the first of his surviving *Erlangen Lectures*, Schelling took a more straightforwardly negative approach to dialectic, dismissing a focus on competing philosophical systems as “mere dialectic, which is in no way science itself, but instead its preparation (S 9: 214).

philosophy that begins with consciousness will be unable to explain the conformity of concepts and objects, for it would attempt to explain an eternally pre-conscious identity from the standpoint of consciousness (S 3: 506). But if the concept is always already derivative, then every advancement from one stage of consciousness to the next is only partially conceptual; a free act of intellectual intuition must also be included. Any system that does not recognize the vital role of intuition would be an “inauthentic idealism, i.e., a system that turns all knowledge into illusion [*Schein*]” (S 3: 427). A philosophy that begins with consciousness never leaves it and thus fails to approach the unprethinkable striving from which consciousness arises. Though Hegel does not define concepts as products of the understanding or abstraction, but rather as the work of spirit itself (H 12: 32), his higher opinion of the concept results from more than a mere terminological difference with Schelling. For Hegel, later stages of spirit’s development can explain, justify, and even forgive movements that initially seem arbitrary, whereas for the Schelling of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, every advancement to an expanded stage of consciousness is fully motivated and justified by a return to the freedom of the I’s original intellectual intuition.

A second difference between the synthetic method and the Hegelian dialectic is (as we will see in Chapter 5)⁶⁰ more a difference of emphasis than a fundamental disagreement. For Schelling in the present work, self-forgetting is an indispensable component in the advancement of consciousness. In coming to know itself through overcoming oscillations, consciousness is also always forgetting that it is the source of its

⁶⁰In Chapter 5, I will argue that the dialectic of phrenology shows that a continual forgetting is essential to the movement of reason. But because Hegel tends to read the dialectic of reason backwards from absolute knowing, he generally emphasizes reason’s efforts to remember itself over its tendency to forget itself.

self-knowledge. Just as the artist loses herself in her work, consciousness loses itself in its products (S 3: 430). That is, the product of intelligence seems for consciousness to have more reality than the intellectual intuition that produced it. This forgetting (which explains the need for philosophy as remembrance) testifies to the “perpetual contradiction” of intellectual intuition: “the intelligence, which has no other urge but to revert into its identity, is thereby placed under a constant compulsion to identity and is no less bound and fettered in the manner of its producing than nature in its productions [*Hervorbringungen*] appears to be” (S 3: 430). While all reason is essentially free (for all the reasons Schelling laid out in *Of the I* and the “Treatises”), theoretical reason is compelled to produce concepts adequate to intuitions over which it lacks complete control. As in nature, this is merely an apparent lack of freedom, for the productive intellect arises from the self-inhibiting freedom of the absolute just as much as nature does. Still, theoretical philosophy presents no way to overcome this apparent lack of freedom. Because the highest act theoretical philosophy can recognize is productive intuition (the positing of forces, organisms, etc., in nature), it cannot fully explain how constrained acts of consciousness are nevertheless free, for all conscious productions rely on previous products of the intelligence (S 3: 486). Without the assurance of a pre-existing harmony between his intuitions and his will, man has no reason to believe that the products of his intellect are anything but arbitrary impositions on nature.

Practical reason can only partially provide this assurance. In his transition to practical philosophy, Schelling retraces Fichte’s steps from the third part of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*. After first giving an explanation of how the I theoretically incorporates alterity into itself, he lays out the structure of willing that makes such

incorporation possible. Yet though theoretical activity cannot occur without willing, willing resides in a later and therefore higher stage of the intelligence's development. Whereas productive intuition inevitably focuses the intelligence on something external to itself (namely, its product), willing makes the *I as a whole* into its object (S 3: 534). Now when I will something, I do project or produce an ideal, just as a theoretical intuition produces a concept, but unlike the concept, the ideal that willing produces is identical with myself (S 3: 536). Whereas a concept always refers to an object independently of me, an ideal is nothing but an act of self-determination. Thus realizing (*Realisieren*) this ideal is a conscious affirmation of myself, whereas the theoretical act of identifying a correspondence of concept and object is only indirectly and unconsciously an affirmation of myself, insofar as my intelligence is originally identical with its objects. Willing is thus able to create a "second nature"⁶¹ over which the consciousness has complete control (S 3: 537). While the first nature arises out of the original limitations of the absolute intelligence and is thus something wholly unconscious and necessary, this second nature is a product of consciousness and therefore fully accessible to the will. Acts within the second nature are entirely independent of the first nature and thus can lay claim to spontaneity.

Yet this is clearly an artificial resolution to Kant's third antinomy. For any act of willing will inevitably take place within a sequence of events and thus be conditioned by previous acts of will. The only thing gained by positing a second nature is to remove the

⁶¹Though Schelling will later identify this second nature with the realm of laws, wherein punishment follows infringements on freedom as if by a natural necessity (S 3: 583), he intends it here in a more general sense. The second nature is a world of free willing, in which intelligences are limited not by natural laws, but by each other. (Cf. S 3: 596, where Schelling identifies the second nature with a "moral order.")

will from the realm of natural causality. Schelling still must deal with the manifold ways that the intelligence predetermines its own acts of willing. Specifically, insofar as the intelligence is able to posit an ideal to realize and thus unify with itself, this ideal must stem from outside of the intelligence. For if it were merely part of the intelligence, then there would be nothing to prevent it from already being realized. And since it cannot come from the first nature, but only from the source of the second nature, that is, an intelligence, it must arise from an intelligence separate from the willing intelligence (S 3: 539-40). Put another way, if willing is the free determination of oneself as a subject-object, then there must already be a subject-object making such determination possible. That is, there must be willing prior to my willing (S 3: 541). Such a willing that comes from me and yet is external to my act of willing is what we call a demand (*Forderung*). A demand is a self-imposed pre-willing that motivates my free willing without necessitating it. In taking a demand as my ideal, I place a condition upon my will, but a condition that it can choose to ignore and suspend.

Although only I can make a demand my ideal, the demand must be external to the act of willing by which I constitute myself, and thus it is only meaningful if it arises from an external intelligence. Yet since the first limitation of transcendental idealism separates a particular intelligence from the absolute, we have no way of conceiving how one intelligence can influence another. Demands must therefore come from within me, but in such a way that they refer me not to myself, but to an external intelligence. In order to make sense of this intelligence that can have no effect on me and yet produces a demand in me, we must postulate a preexisting harmony between intelligences (S 3: 543). That is, the external intelligence that makes demands of me must share common thoughts and

structures of intuition with me, for otherwise there would be no reason to assume that the demands I experience are at all similar to those he places on me.

Even through his obscure and ontologized jargon, it is clear that Schelling is speaking here of what a more recent tradition of obscure and ontologized jargon would call the ethical relation to the other. While my being is never dependent on the other nor his on mine, it is precisely for this reason that the demand he places on me is absolute (S 3: 554-5). Because the other intelligence must stand outside of the willing by which I constitute myself, he, unlike the second nature, is completely inaccessible to my willing. Since the other's demand comes from beyond me, I cannot eliminate or controvert it, though of course I am free to ignore it. Yet the content of this demand is wholly abstract and thus extends to regions not typically thought of as ethical. It is only because other intelligences can affect objects and produce artifacts (*Kunstprodukte*) that these can be absolute objects for me. Without the "invisible ideal resistance" that suggests to me the existence of other willing intelligences, I could conceive all objects as only relatively so. Though they stand opposed to me, they do so only at my bidding; in that they can be shaped in and by my consciousness, they are infinitely plastic (S 3: 554). The artifact, on the other hand, points to an intelligence independent of my willing and thus forever beyond it.

It is only through consciousness of this restrictedness of artifacts that I can become conscious of my freedom. In every act of willing, I produce an opposition between an object and an ideal (S 3: 559). In willing to raise my arm, for instance, I oppose its objective hanging state with its ideal raised state. This opposition engenders what Schelling calls a drive (*Trieb*), a free activity that nevertheless "springs from a

feeling immediately and without any reflection” (S 3: 559-60). A feeling, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, is a contradiction in consciousness. A drive is thus a free but nonreflective response to the contradiction between an ideal and an object of willing. In response to this disequilibrium a drive seeks to restore wholeness to consciousness (S 3: 560). The experience of freedom consists in reflecting on this drive to eliminate feelings (i.e. contradictions of consciousness) by sustaining and restoring the continuity of consciousness; “That freedom is at every moment limited and yet at every moment again becomes infinite, in respect of its striving, is what alone makes possible the consciousness of freedom, that is, the continuance of self-consciousness⁶² itself” (S 3: 561). Though it emerges in the original intuition, self-consciousness, which is constantly in danger of falling into contradiction, is sustained by a demand—that is, by something outside of itself. According to Schelling, this most general demand is nothing other than what Kant had called the categorical imperative: “thou shalt only will what all intelligences are able to will” (S 3: 574). But this means that external intelligences are necessary for the presentation of self-consciousness itself. Only insofar as I am constantly encountering other intelligences (through artifacts or objects over which I lack complete control) is the demand for me to be one with myself reinforced (S 3: 582). Though it is, in the end, always my choice whether or not to respond to demands placed upon me, I would not be free in their absence.

Despite its equivocations in terminology and structure, the *System of Transcendental Idealism* does manage to develop a method for considering freedom

⁶²Here we see an equivocation in Schelling’s terminology. Whereas he had earlier defined self-consciousness as a pure act of intuition preceding all consciousness, here he indicates that it is something whose continuation needs to be strived for—a relation to oneself that is not timeless and absolute, but temporally mediated by the will.

systematically. Rather than beginning with a presentation of freedom in its very enactment (as in Fichte's 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre*) or of its apparent impossibility in light of natural causality (Kant's second *Critique*), the *System*'s "synthetic method" allows freedom to reassert itself at every level of the development of consciousness. In the theoretical stage, the intelligence learns that what it supposes to be an external necessity governing its intuitions arises from its own power of intuition. As it moves into practical considerations, it learns that it is free to produce another nature in which its willing is independent of natural necessity. And when it encounters objects produced by intelligences other than itself, it recognizes that the existence of these other intelligences is essential to its own freedom. In the end, freedom is only intelligible within an empirical world that resists the intelligence. The absolute willing that precedes this world precedes all demands and is thus beyond freedom (S 3: 577).

Yet ultimately, Schelling deems this method a failure, and devotes the book's last part to showing that art, and not philosophy, completes the system of freedom. For we have seen that freedom of willing is dependent on a community of mutually demanding intelligences. Though we must postulate a limited preexisting harmony in the thoughts and demands of these individuals, a community in which each can exercise his freedom through responding to the categorical imperative cannot be left to chance (S 3: 584). Rather, we must take it as "an eternal article of faith" that man is progressing to a point where the categorical imperative can be universally upheld (S 3: 593). Schelling's account of the freedom of willing must thus be supplemented with a philosophy of history, "which latter is for the practical part of philosophy precisely what nature is for the theoretical part" (S 3: 590). Schelling does not clarify why this analogy holds, but it

can be said that in each case the relationship between the part of transcendental philosophy and the tangential inquiry is twofold. While nature philosophy is given a starting point in the transcendental I's postulation of matter and the philosophy of history in the postulation of a second nature, both Nature Philosophy and the philosophy of history investigate the conditions of possibility of transcendental philosophy. Just as nature philosophy investigates how it is possible for a conscious I to emerge, the philosophy of history investigates how a community of freely willing individuals can emerge.

The task of the philosophy of history is to show how there can be a providence (*Vorsehung*) or fate (*Schicksal*) such that through free events a moral order emerges by necessity (S 3: 596). Such a providence can be neither a completely objective (Leibnizian) God who predetermines the totality of human actions from without (for this would deny freedom) nor a principle of arbitrary subjectivity (for this would deny necessity), but must yield a harmony between freedom and intelligence. Between these extremes of fatalism and atheism is what Schelling calls religion, which is best exemplified by the figure of the dramatic poet:

If we think of history as a play in which everyone involved performs his part quite freely and as he pleases, a rational development of this muddled drama is conceivable only if there be a single spirit who speaks in everyone, and if the poet [*Dichter*], whose mere fragments (*disjecta membra poetae*) are the individual actors, has already so harmonized beforehand the objective outcome of the whole with the free play of every participant, that something rational must indeed emerge at the end of it. (S 3: 602)

However, Schelling goes on to insist, we should not see this poet as existing independently of the play, for then he would merely be the fatalistic God by another name. In contrast, "If he *is* not independently of us, but reveals and discloses himself

successively only, through the very play of our own freedom, so that without this freedom even he *would not be*, then we are collaborators [*Mitdichter*] of the whole and inventors of the particular roles we play” (S 3: 602). Were we to postulate an external poet, or even to identify particular moments in which his influence is apparent, we would thereby deny the possibility of human freedom.

Since we cannot make this poet or his works an object of philosophy, we must look elsewhere for an adequate presentation of him. We need, that is, evidence that human activity is at once conscious and unconscious, purposive and purposeless (S 3: 612-3). In contrast to nature, which moves from the completely objective and unconscious to the subjective and conscious, we are looking for a product that begins as conscious and subjective and becomes unconscious, one that shows that in even the most capricious acts of subjectivity an objective order is operative. In other words, in this product “the I is conscious in respect of production and unconscious in regard to the product” (S 3: 613). Although adherence to the categorical imperative can also be a conscious production of an unconscious product, insofar as the agent realizes a demand that comes from beyond his subjectivity, the product is not totally objective, since willing the categorical imperative is tantamount to willing oneself. In order to present the unity of freedom and providence, we need an activity that goes beyond willing, an activity that instead of returning to itself expands over the whole universe. Unlike willing, whose completion yields a feeling of excitement or fulfillment, this activity will yield a feeling of “infinite tranquility [*Befriedigung*]” (S 3: 615). This feeling is none other than that of the artist, who “attributes that total resolution of his conflict which he finds achieved in his work of art, not to himself, but to a bounty [*Gunst*] freely granted by his own nature,

which, however unrelentingly it set him in conflict with himself, is no less gracious in relieving him of the pain of this contradiction” (S 3: 617). In the artwork the separation between the ideal and the object of willing vanishes, and thus we encounter no demand, no drive, no freedom. Where the willing intelligence finds himself united with his freedom in the second nature, the artist finds himself united with the indifference at the ground of all freedom and thus completes the unification of freedom and providence.

In locating this union in the artwork, Schelling appeals to two common phenomena. First, the testimony of artists reveals that while they are quite clear in their intentions with regard to any particular artwork, they cannot say why they have these intentions. There is an unconscious urge compelling them to create art, which only finds satisfaction in the resolution of all contradiction in the form of the beautiful (S 3: 616). Second, in the observation of the artwork we find an infinite meaning that could not possibly have been intended by the artist, for not only is it impossible for a finite being to actualize an infinity of purposes, but the infinite gap between the conscious and the unconscious outstrips any conceptualization. The artist, like the willing intelligence, is thus ruled by destiny, but in such a way that “separates him from all other human beings, and compels him to say or depict things which he does not fully understand himself, and whose meaning is infinite” (S 3: 617). While all production is intended to resolve a contradiction, only the artistic product resolves the highest contradiction and thus finds sufficiency in itself without any external purpose.

Art repairs the first separation with which philosophy begins. In this limited sense the *System of Transcendental Idealism* is a complete system, since it ends where it begins. Yet not every homecoming is an odyssey, and in returning to its beginning the

System does not thereby conclude its wandering.⁶³ For there is no reason to believe that the art product, regardless of whether it unifies freedom and necessity, is able to present the whole movement of transcendental philosophy. It seems, rather, that it stands outside of this movement as a moment absolved of the contradictions and reconciliations of human intuition. The *System*'s elegant and inspiring vision of a distinctly human reason guided by intuition is thus suspended in its conclusion, leaving the reader without a sense of the proper place of reason and intuition in philosophy. We thus see a resignation similar to that found in the nature philosophy. If the *System* is the retelling of the nature philosophy from the perspective of reason's encounter with exteriority, then what holds of nature also applies to reason: just as life is the bridge to its own death, reason is the bridge to its own dissolution.

Yet Hegel's essay on the *Difference between the Fichtean and Schellingian Systems of Philosophy*, written shortly after Schelling had procured for him a *Privatdozent* position at Jena, works fiercely to preserve Schelling's vision of a reason guided by human intuition. Accounts of Hegel's early Jena writings usually invoke one of two narratives: either they contrast the spiritual dynamism and relative theoretical paucity of these early writings with the completeness and fullness of his later system, using later developments to fill in the early gaps, or they focus on the irony of the future

⁶³Schelling's claims in the concluding pages of Part 6 that "we recognize in [nature] the odyssey of the spirit" (S 3: 628) and that the *System* is complete because it has been "led back to his starting point" (S 3: 628) are optimistic exaggerations. While the art object does promise in intuition a unity of subject and object, by holding the art object outside of the system Schelling fails to develop the sense in which the system has returned to itself. In the *Freiheitsschrift*, Schelling will ultimately question the need for a system to return to itself in general. By placing reason on the periphery of the system, Schelling undermines the role of homecoming in the necessity of system.

king of German philosophy having to beg for a dozentship and cut his philosophical teeth in the shadow of his younger friend from Tübingen. Doubtless, there are good Hegelian reasons for both of these narratives—the first because it reflects systematic wholeness as the fundamental drive of Hegel’s philosophy and the second because it emphasizes that thought in general, and Hegel’s in particular, does not arrive on the scene fully formed, but develops in response to the difficulties it encounters—but for now I want to focus on another narrative: the development of Hegel’s concept of speculation from out of Schelling’s first systematic efforts.⁶⁴ In the *Difference* essay, Hegel shows that reason cannot be understood without the incorporation of a life-affirming urge propelling it through and beyond oscillation. The movement of what Schelling calls the synthetic method is never the merely mechanical incorporation of the not-I that Fichte imagines, but always involves an inspiration or instinct (H 4: 7) leading self-consciousness beyond the oppositions in which it can find itself trapped.

The occasion for the *Difference* essay, Hegel writes in its Preface, is twofold. If the vitality of post-Kantian idealism is to be preserved, it is necessary both to uncover the true spirit of Kantian philosophy, allowing that it may sometimes be in conflict with the letter of Kant’s writings, and to distinguish the systems of Fichte and Schelling both from each other and from Kant’s (H 4: 5). By the end of the essay these two tasks will

⁶⁴It should be noted that in the *Differenzschrift* Hegel is not relying solely on the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, but is also concerned with Schelling’s 1801 *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* and his response in Volume 2, Issue 1 of the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* to Eschenmeyer’s article “Spontaneität = Weltseele oder das höchste Prinzip der Naturphilosophie.” While I have chosen to discuss the *Darstellung* in my next chapter to show how it addresses some of the concerns Hegel raises and departs from the humanistic ideal of the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, it should nevertheless be born in mind that Hegel is also relying on this more developed version of Schelling’s system of identity.

coincide, as showing the difference between Fichte and Schelling will reveal the spirit of Kant's thought. But to appreciate Kant's "authentic idealism," it is first necessary to separate its "speculative principle" from the "ratiocinative reflection [*räsonierenden Reflexion*]" pervading the first critique and disguising its true spirit (H 4: 5). Both speculation and ratiocination (which exposes an obvious flaw in the standard translation of *Vernunft* as 'reason') arise from the activity of reason, but whereas ratiocination is a stunted version of reason, speculation comprises its very core. To avoid giving it a fixed definition inappropriate to its self-overcoming content, Hegel is coy about collapsing the "speculative principle" into a proposition, but he does allow that it is "boldly expressed" in both Kant's prioritization of reason in critical philosophy and Fichte's $I = I$, both of which exhort us to find the unity of subject and object in thought. Speculation, then, is reason raised to knowledge of (itself as) the absolute. Ratiocination, on the other hand, is the decay and instrumentalization of reason, such that reason's urge for identity becomes a mere means for explanation. The ratiocinative philosopher indefinitely postpones his search for unity in thought and settles instead for empty schemata laying out merely external relations among the objects of thought.

We can see Kant's alternation between speculation and ratiocination most clearly, Hegel thinks, in the first *Critique's* deduction of the categories. On the one hand, the deduction reaches the very height of speculation by making reason responsible for regulating the understanding. The contents of the understanding are only the dead products of ratiocination, and so by having reason investigate the functioning and proper use of these categories Kant makes the free self-determination of reason primary. But on the other hand, by using such categories as unity and causality to show the structure of

the mind (*Gemüt*), he allows them to transcend their roles as “dead pigeonholes” and reflect on the nature of thought (H 4: 5). By making reason an object of the understanding, Kant has “allowed negative ratiocination [*Räsonieren*] to go on replacing philosophy,” just as it had in all previous, non-idealistic (purported) systems of philosophy (H 4: 5). This results in one of the great ironies of the first *Critique*: though the understanding is an almost mechanical, subordinate faculty tied to definitions, deductive inferences, and other means of calcifying concepts, Kant never defines it, for he approaches it through reason, which favors unity over rigid definitions. Yet Kant does define reason as the faculty of the unity of thought, and thus denies it its rightful place as the source of unity in general. For if reason is only the faculty that unites the products of the imagination and understanding into a coherent whole, then there is a gap between reason and object, which can only be mediated by the twelve acts of pure understanding.⁶⁵

Hegel largely holds onto the Kantian assumption that the conditioned is the object of the understanding and the unconditioned that of reason, but because reason must ultimately suspend the subject-object distinction, he formulates this assumption differently. For Hegel, the understanding is the need or tendency to present every individual object of thought alongside its object, whereas reason “unites these contradictories, posits them both together, and suspends them both [*hebt beide auf*]” (H 4: 23). While, for example, the understanding conceives human freedom and natural

⁶⁵Hegel underlines this irony in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* by calling reason’s object, “the unity of self-consciousness and being,” the “category” (H 9: 134, ¶235). The devices that Kant attempts to use to reflect on the nature of reason are themselves the very essence of reason, and their separation from reality (which reason refuses to see) is the basis for reason’s ultimate perversity and undoing.

necessity in eternal conflict, reason elevates both freedom and necessity into a principle found in both human action and nature. Reason becomes speculation when it abandons all opposition and mediation between itself and its object—when it discovers its own absoluteness, “by raising itself to itself, putting its trust only in itself and the absolute which at that moment becomes its object” (H 4: 11).

Ironically, this means that Hegel gives a greater philosophical significance to the understanding than Schelling does. In contrast to Schelling’s *Ideas*, Hegel makes the understanding the source of separation, and thus in a way the origin of philosophy.⁶⁶ For “Diremption [*Entzweiung*] is the source of *the need of philosophy*” (H 4: 12). The genitive here has the dual significance that philosophy not only responds to the feeling of need that separation produces, but also possesses its own needs, which stem from the same diremption. As the source of this dual need, the understanding is essential to carrying out the task of philosophy. Where reason is already certain of its identity with the absolute, “the understanding, the power [*Kraft*] to set limits, erects its building and places it between man and the absolute, linking everything that man thinks worthy and holy to this building, fortifying it through all the powers [*Mächte*] of nature and talent and expanding it into infinity. The entire totality of limitations is to be found in it, but not the absolute itself” (H 4: 12-13). The same could be said for life, which “eternally forms itself by setting up oppositions, and totality at the highest level of life [*Lebendigkeit*] is only possible through its own reproduction out of the greatest separation” (H 4: 13). A philosophy without the understanding would thus be either dead

⁶⁶A few pages later (H 4: 16), Hegel will suspend this claim that philosophy begins with the understanding, for the absolute must be the source of all knowledge. The narrative wherein the understanding gives birth to a need which reason then fulfills is itself therefore merely reflective (i.e., not speculative).

or inorganic, completely lacking in the contradiction necessary to spur it on to higher forms of existence. But this should not imply that the goal of philosophy is merely to maintain these contradictions and go on living. Absolute knowledge is beyond life, for it knows the absurdity of life's striving to move beyond itself: "The more stable and splendid the edifice of the understanding is, the more restless becomes the striving [*Bestreben*] of the life that is caught up as a part of it to get out of it and raise itself to freedom" (H 4: 13). Thus while reason is constantly striving to escape the "rigid antitheses" of the understanding and resist all efforts to turn its own negative activity into a product, it is also able to suspend this striving through the speculative knowledge of its own identity with the absolute.

But this entire discourse itself fails to reach the level of speculation, for it begins outside of reason with the limitations of the understanding and consequent needfulness of philosophy. If we see reason merely as growing out of the understanding and rejecting its oppositions, then we will conceive it only through negation and limitation. The understanding will seize upon reason's negating activity (and more often, the products of this negation) and ignore the positive, self-certain knowledge that makes reason speculative. Thus Hegel continues his rather odd-sounding personification of the understanding and reason and presents a second discourse wherein reason disguises itself as a force for the sole purpose of "seducing" the understanding into overcoming its own inner contradictions (H 4: 17). This evolutionary narrative, we will soon see, should not be seized upon as a categorical description of mental forces, but instead should be taken as part of reason's historical cunning and play, as a myth for how reason could come to dominate philosophy. By allowing itself to be conceived as dual forces uniting and

separating subject and object, reason makes itself accessible to the understanding, which sees it as reflection, as a mere instrument for uniting the world. If reason is nothing but a force positing what is identical with it and counter-positing what is opposed, then the understanding assumes that reason (reflection) merely adds complexity to our understanding of the world. But without an opposing force, the understanding becomes completely boundless and dissipates itself in its own infinite striving. More concretely, if reason allows the understanding to conceive the task of all thinking to be the infinite proliferation of distinctions and categories, the understanding will soon grasp its own futility and see that it was reason all along. For insofar as it insists on seeing itself as knowing the world through determining it, the understanding will be forced to concede that its determinations are inevitably surrounded by a horizon of indetermination (H 4: 17). Given this realization, it can either stubbornly insist on living in a world of contradictions or acknowledge the speculative and make the leap into self-knowledge. By forcing the understanding to reflect upon its own contradictions and thus making the overcoming of contradictions a criterion for truth, reason announces its sovereignty over truth and assures that it will never be instrumentalized as mere reflection.

Ultimately, however, any narrative accounting for the superiority of reason to the understanding will prove inadequate, for speculation cannot accept reason's opposition to anything. While it is useful to explain the resistance the understanding poses to speculation, all such narratives are mere acts of reflection instrumentalizing reason's negative force to overcome the contrary force of understanding. Speculation demands that knowledge arise not from the inadequacy of previous knowledge, but from connection with the absolute itself. Thus the only adequate way to present the movement

of reason is through a system, through reason's self-presentation: "The philosophizing that does not construct itself into a system is a constant flight from limitations—more reason's struggling for freedom than the pure self-cognition of reason that has become secure in itself and clear about itself" (H 4: 30). A system is not a presentation of the struggle for the absolute, but the self-presenting absolute itself. Only in the suspension of all limitations is a system free and self-sufficient.

Thus the test of any speculative philosophy will be whether it is able to unite all of reality with the absolute. For this reason, Schelling's system is to be preferred over Fichte's despite the fact that they both begin from the same principle and respond to the same philosophical urge. Because of Fichte's insistence on analyzing reason's development into discrete acts, he never gets beyond the conditioned. The system, Hegel attests, begins promisingly enough, with the I positing itself as absolute. Yet with the positing of the not-I, the absoluteness of this act is dissolved, for now there is an act outside of absolute self-positing that purports to be equally absolute (H 4: 37). In order to unite the transcendental I with its empirical counterpart, the I must posit not only its own pure activity, but a not-I opposed to it. But in order to unite the I and not-I, their unity must also be posited. This third principle sunders the absoluteness of the first two by positing a divisible not-I opposed to a divisible I. These two terms are not equal, for it is the I that posits both itself as subject and the not-I as object. Thus the I acts speculatively by making the unity of subject and object its principle.

Nevertheless, Fichte's system turns out to be dogmatic, for this principle is not fully speculative. By uniting the subject and object in the I, Fichte presents a subjective subject-object, but not an objective one. Put formally, whereas Fichte sees the subject as

an $I = I$, he can only conceive of the object as an $I + \text{not-}I$ (H 4: 40). The productive imagination that supposedly gives rise to both subject and object is the I only as theoretical and cannot raise itself above this division (H 4: 40). As Schelling's nature philosophy demonstrated, it is not enough for the I to posit both subject and object. For the objective develops into the subjective just as much as the subjective incorporates the objective. If we ignore the development of reason's objective side, then we end up with a rational subjectivity seeking to command an irrational objectivity—a recipe for both tyranny and despair. In striving to know the irrational grounds of its empirical cognitions, the I will encounter limitations which it will never be able to overcome.

Of course, Fichte himself saw this eternal non-identity of theoretical reason with its object, which is why he insisted that practical reason must be its ground. But Hegel maintains that even in the practical sphere Fichte is unable to realize an objective subject-object. Since the objectivity of the object outstrips the ability of theoretical reason to bring it into accord with itself, practical reason seeks to nullify the objective world by giving the I absolute causal power over the not- I (H 4: 40). But there is no such thing as "absolute causal power," for causation implies that the cause is not absolute, but relative to an effect. Thus if this unity of subject and object is not to be given with the same intellectual intuition by which I register that $I = I$, then it can only be stated as "I ought to equal I " (H 4: 33). The world is thus bound together not by a unity, but by a striving for unity. When I conceive of my identity with reality in terms of a striving to remake it in my image, I fix the opposition between the transcendental and empirical realms. The difference between willing and experience is not recognized as an abstraction to be dissolved by speculation, but as a fundamental structure of reality. Thus for Fichte the

freedom of the I can at best be only negative; it is free not through its absolute actualization in the world, but only insofar as it is not limited by the world, insofar as it itself does the limiting (H 4: 45). By defining itself as something absolutely opposed to empirical reality, reason places an external limitation on its freedom, and thus falls into reflection. As Schelling's nature philosophy showed, only if the receding object, the *Anstoss*, is itself rational, can it be both unconditioned and united with subjectivity.

The fundamental problem with Fichte's emphasis on striving, Hegel argues, is that it eschews space in favor of time. By stretching out self-identity into an eternal striving, Fichte makes time the medium for what would otherwise be absolute. Hegel grants, "Existence prolonged into eternity involves both the infinity of the idea and intuition within itself, but in forms that make their synthesis impossible" (H 4: 46). Time cannot provide the unity of subject and object because it necessarily involves opposition and extraneousness (*Entgegensetzung, ein Aussereinander*). The I is removed from its fulfillment, placed outside of it and held there: "The lengthening of existence simply palliates [*beschönigt*] the opposition in a synthesis of time, the poverty of which, instead of being fully supplied, just becomes more conspicuous as a result of this palliative union with an infinity that is absolutely opposed to it" (S 4: 47).⁶⁷ The systematic result of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*⁶⁸ is thus untrue to the philosophy from which it sets out. Though its principle is the unity and freedom of the I, the *Wissenschaftslehre* actually

⁶⁷Of course, space also involves extraneousness and synthesis of opposites, but this "can be said to be an infinitely richer synthesis than time" (H 4: 47). The poverty of the I, that is, is not nearly as pronounced when its potential fulfillment lies present all around. As I will show in the next chapter, this privileging of space over time is vital to his avoidance of a totalizing reason.

⁶⁸Again, Hegel is relying almost exclusively on the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1794 and Schelling's analyses of it.

ensures that “the I suspends [*hebt . . . auf*] itself as object and therewith also as subject” (H 4: 50). Rather than affirming identity, the Fichtean system denies and consumes it.

But while Hegel claims to reject only Fichte’s system and not the philosophy that underlies it (H 4: 34), he nevertheless suggests that there is something lacking in the spirit of Fichte’s philosophy as well. While the cool reception that met Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* was partially due to the philosophical tin ear of his contemporaries, Hegel gives Fichte’s detractors some credit, for every age instinctually turns to the philosophers who meet its most pressing spiritual needs, regardless of whether it can understand them (H 4: 8). Though Fichte’s readers have lobbed unfair and even absurd objections in his direction, Hegel maintains they can nevertheless sense that neither Fichte nor Kant⁶⁹ has done right by nature. Since the *Wissenschaftslehre* defines nature solely in its opposition to the I (as its condition and product), nature is for Fichte wholly lifeless (H 4: 50). Rather than an objectivity freely developing into subjectivity (as in Schelling’s nature philosophy), Fichte’s nature is the antithesis of freedom. As the unfreedom opposed to free consciousness, nature must conform to the ends of the I, so that lumber exists solely to provide man shelter, combustion solely to provide him heat, and so on. If a given natural product does not conform to a given need, this is only an indication of nature’s unfreedom, and thus a different natural object must be posited to meet this need (H 4: 70). The superficiality of this method and its inappropriateness for the time, Hegel claims, should be quite apparent. For philosophy’s task is not to assert

⁶⁹While Hegel subsumes Kant in his criticisms of Fichte, he notes that nature is not quite as lifeless for Kant as it is for Fichte. Like Fichte, Kant argues that the understanding must be able to determine nature, but since for Kant this must be a nonhuman understanding, the dissolution of nature into the I is merely a reflective maxim rather than a constitutive principle of subjectivity (H 4: 53).

man's dominion over nature, but "to set reason itself in harmony [*Übereinstimmung*] with nature, not by having reason renounce itself or become an insipid imitator of nature, but by reason recasting itself into nature out of its own inner strength" (H 4: 8). Such a harmony (demanded unconsciously by many of Fichte's detractors) can only be achieved through a system that can present the absolute subject-object both subjectively and objectively.

A speculative system must therefore take the form of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*, wherein oppositions are overcome until all cognition is of the absolute. Without the impetus and ability to overcome oppositions, a system "is satisfied with its negative side, where everything finite is drowned in the infinite" (H 4: 63). This is, of course, precisely the criticism that Hegel levels against Schelling (or, if we believe Hegel's letter to Schelling,⁷⁰ against a certain facile interpretation of Schelling) in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*. The unfairness of this attack, given that Hegel's dialectical method is largely derived from Schelling, has been widely noted.⁷¹ But what has received less attention is the fact that Hegel first launches this criticism in the supposedly sycophantic *Difference* essay. In particular, Hegel disputes Schelling's claim that he has discovered a new method by which all of the world's finite differences can be deduced from a transcendental I. Indeed, Hegel argues, what Schelling calls the synthetic method is not the heart of this system. For synthesis always relates two limited things as limited. Synthesis is bound up with suspending the *feeling* of contradiction and thus inadequately presents what is solely the movement of reason. True, Hegel admits, feeling "is, like matter, something subjective and objective at the same time" (H 4: 48); but it is,

⁷⁰*Briefe von und an Hegel*, pp. 159-62 (May 1, 1807).

⁷¹Wirth 185; Deleuze 190-1.

like Fichte's I, merely a subjective subject-object since it does not know the grounds of its union with its object. Therefore, "The method of the system should be called neither synthetic nor analytic. It shows itself at its purest, when it appears as a development of reason itself" (H 4: 31). A true system of philosophy cannot be the recounting of a series of syntheses, but must instead present the activity of reason itself.

Since reason is nothing other than its own self-presentation (*Darstellen ihrer selbst*), Hegel argues that Schelling is right to emphasize the importance of intellectual intuition in completing the system (H 4: 30). In intellectual intuition, reason suspends its negative moments and presents itself as absolute. But as Schelling is always careful to note, "The claims of separation must be admitted just as much as those of identity" (H 4: 64). Speculation (and we should not forget its literal visual meaning) is impossible both in the dark night of the absolute and in the pure "colorless light" of the intuition of fanatic rapture (*Schwärmerei*) (H 4: 64). Like dogmatic idealism, such *Schwärmerei* is also (merely) reflective, for it opposes finite earthly existence with an infinite beyond with no conception of their union.

Thus what is needed in systematic philosophy is a disciplined intuition, a speculation that can suspend (*aufheben*) every opposition without annihilating it. Schelling's division of philosophy into transcendental and natural sides accomplishes this nobly, since it presents the absolute from two different standpoints which nevertheless reaffirm and reinforce one another. The nature philosophy shows the objective unity of subject and object by presenting the development of objectivity into subjectivity, and the transcendental philosophy shows the subjective unity of subject and object by showing how the intelligence (subjectivity) raises itself to suspend any opposition between itself

and its other. By arriving at a common unity, these two sciences suspend their difference in starting point and thus respond to the speculative need to overcome separation. The point at which they meet, which Hegel (following Schelling) calls the indifference point,⁷² “the lightning stroke of the ideal upon the real, . . . the ultimate apex of nature’s pyramid, its final product, the point of arrival at which it becomes complete” (H 4: 74-5). In this obscure passage, Hegel astutely notes that reason is not simply the beginning of transcendental philosophy (as self-positing I) and end of nature philosophy (as the final product of nature’s overcoming of inhibitions); it extends itself beyond any determinate starting and ending points. As Fichte realized, but had trouble incorporating into his system, the reason that allows the transcendental I to incorporate objectivity into itself is never simply an act, but always precedes the first act of consciousness. And unlike Fichte’s deduction of nature, which “is immediately satisfied with what it postulates” (H 4: 70), Schelling’s system makes reason expand itself into nature, so that nature does not reach its culmination in human reason, but is a continual becoming-rational. In Schelling’s uniting of transcendental and nature philosophy, reason, as the striving for identity from out of separation, comes to know itself in the human spirit.

Yet even in recognizing that the speculative power of intuition is more central to the *System of Transcendental Idealism*’s account of reason than the synthetic method’s

⁷²The metaphor comes from the study of magnetism. Halfway between the negative and positive (north and south) poles of a magnet is a point at which the two poles meet. If the magnet is broken in half at this point, two new magnets will be formed, each with its own negative and positive pole. In an article in his *Zeitschrift für Spekulative Physik*, Schelling expands the concept of the indifference point into a general phenomenon at every level of nature. Whenever there is an opposition in nature (of attractive and expansive forces, for example), there will be a point at which the opposition is *suspended*, where the activity of the opposites is in equilibrium, and there is the possibility of each becoming dominant (“Allgemeine Deduktion des dynamischen Prozesses oder der Kategorien der Physik,” v. 1:1, pp. 110-1).

overcoming of oscillation, Hegel is forced to conclude with Schelling that something beyond reason is necessary to present the absolute. Though speculation is reason's highest moment, it is also its principle of dissolution,

for in its highest synthesis of the conscious and the unconscious, speculation also demands the nullification of consciousness itself. Reason thus drowns its knowledge, its reflection of the absolute identity, and itself in its own abyss; and in this night of mere reflection and of the ratiocinative understanding, in this night which is the noonday of life, common sense and speculation can meet one another. (H 4: 23)

Whereas Schelling's early works showed the abyss of the understanding, here Hegel suggests that reason itself is abyssal. Because the aim of transcendental philosophy is to bring all of reality to consciousness (or to presentation in a work of consciousness), it fails to present what is prior to and indifferent to consciousness. Though Hegel does not say here what, if not the artwork, is to present this space behind reason, his language indicates that this is a flaw not merely of Schelling's specific attempt to develop a system of all philosophy, but with the demands of reason itself. In a movement that Hegel will elaborate upon in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, reason suspends not only its ground in intuition, but its very striving. The speculative impulse for the absolute leads reason to see that it, like the ratiocinative understanding that it criticizes, has no value in itself, but is merely a step along the way to the absolute.

Chapter 4: The Night of Reason

“The standpoint of philosophy is the standpoint of reason; its cognition is a cognition of things as they are in themselves, that is, as they are in reason.” (S 4: 115)

“I must grasp myself with all my might in order to save myself from the abyss of intuition.” (S 1: 325)

In the last of his 1795 *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, Schelling describes what might be called the midlife crisis of reason. Having grown to self-consciousness in the time of the Greeks and then proved its potency as an adult by weeding out superstition in the Enlightenment, reason in Kant’s philosophy suddenly realizes its own finitude, that no matter how successful it is in overcoming the gaps and traps of the understanding, it can never be its own ground (S 1: 339). Faced with the knowledge that its self-conception as striving to achieve absolute unity itself forestalls any possibility of unity, “The weapons slipped from the hand, and the valiant reason which, by itself, had annihilated the delusions of the objective world, whined childishly at its own weakness” (S 1: 340). The reference here is to certain unnamed successors of Kant (perhaps Jacobi, for instance), who, having accepted the inaccessibility of the thing-in-itself as a dogmatic truth, decided to take their rationality and go home, as it were, elevating faith and non-reason to a position equal to reason.

Yet we find in some works of Schelling and Hegel an equally juvenile response, where instead of refusing to participate in a game it knows it cannot win, reason utters a crude “Nunh-unh,” denying the existence of anything that does not conform to it. This criticism has been directed at Hegel so frequently (by Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, and so on) that it would not be especially productive for me to rehash its justification here. Instead, I will end this chapter by contrasting certain totalizing

impulses in the *Encyclopedia* (particularly in relation to time) with opposed claims in the *Phenomenology*. But first, given that Schelling is frequently cited in contemporary literature as a counterweight to Hegel's totalized vision of reason, I intend to show that Schelling's Identity Philosophy is equally childish⁷³ and exclusionary and that Hegel's famous "night in which all cows are black" criticism has a certain force against at least this period of Schelling's works, if not against his early philosophy as a whole.⁷⁴

In his 1801 *Presentation [Darstellung] of my System of Philosophy* and the unpublished 1804 manuscript *System of Philosophy in General and of Nature Philosophy in Particular*, which was to complete and clarify the *Darstellung*, Schelling assumes from the very beginning that reason is identical with all reality, which makes all question of how it achieves unity with its other superfluous. And yet, vacuous as this response to the dilemmas raised in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* is, it is not a simple reversion to childhood, but part of the working-out of reason's mid-life crisis. Given that Schelling traces this crisis to reason's self-conception as striving for identity with all reality, a simple alternative is to assume this striving always already fulfilled. And given that reason's relationship to its other was shown most clearly to be problematic in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*'s treatments of humanity and intuition, an extreme mathematical formalism like we find in the *Darstellung* also poses a natural alternative.

⁷³Showing the biting wit that makes his reading of Schelling so pleasurable, Tilliette likens Schelling's later favorable references to the *Darstellung* to "the sort of affection one feels for a sickly child" (v. 1, p. 263).

⁷⁴Cf. Michael Vater's claim that "the Philosophy of Identity was a monstrously boring construction, an imposition of the same on the different by the manipulation of a sterile formula: *the quantitative difference* (or in the highest case, the indifference) *of the subjective and the objective*, or the *identity of identity and opposition*. It was encyclopaedic without being really systematic; one could not see the articulation of the principle of system, one could only read about it after the fact" (Vater 2004, 201).

The Identity Philosophy is thus more than a simple detour on the way to Hegel and Schelling's treatments of reason in 1807 and 1809. The cancellation of striving through dissolving everything into the absolute stands over against the incorporative drive of speculation, hinting at a dark core of irrationality that reason can never incorporate. As in every crisis or *Ent-scheidung*, reason is here forced to choose: will it accept its limitations and revise and expand its self-conception on the basis of this new knowledge, or will it deny the existence of anything outside itself?

Whereas the *System of Transcendental Idealism* continued Schelling's reworking of the Kantian distinction between reason and the understanding, the *Darstellung* unapologetically begins with a renunciation of this whole network of concerns. Reason, Schelling proclaims, is identical not only with philosophy, but with everything conceivable, and hence we may use the phrases "in itself [*an sich*]" and "in reason" interchangeably (S 4: 115). But Schelling again misleadingly insists, as he had in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, that his system itself has remained unchanged; he here intends merely to give a new, unitary presentation to the same insights expressed in the nature and transcendental philosophies (S 4: 108).⁷⁵ In contrast to these previous partial presentations, the *Darstellung* is to present nothing but the system in its totality.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Taking this claim at face value, commentators often refer to the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and sometimes even the *Naturphilosophie* as early works in the system of identity. This, I will show in this chapter, is misleading, for the works of the Identity Philosophy proper (*i.e.*, the *Darstellung* and *System of Philosophy in General*) reject the developmental or "synthetic" structure of Schelling's previous works.

⁷⁶Such totalizing reason needs to be distinguished from what I have called Fichte's totalitarian reason, which, like any totalitarian regime, fails to live up to its promises or incorporate all its citizens into itself. Schelling's Identity Philosophy is not despotic in

The relationship between reason and presentation does not need to be explored because the presentation is inseparable from reason. Schelling simply ignores the difficulties of uniting the history of self-consciousness with its original unfolding, ending his prefatory remarks on the inadequacies of his previous systems by declaring, “From this point on, I speak only the matter itself [*die Sache selbst*] (S 4: 114). Self-consciously using Spinoza as a model (S 4: 113), Schelling begins with a definition of reason as absolute totality and seeks to derive the entirety of his system. Whereas Spinoza had begun by identifying God with all being (substance), Schelling begins by identifying reason with the absolute, or with the “indifference of the subjective and objective” (S 4: 114). It is thus not to be taken as the subjective principle, but as the indifference point of subject and object. As a mere point, it is indifferent to all relations of space and time and completely independent in itself. “It is the nature of philosophy,” Schelling argues, “to cancel [*aufzuheben*] every succession and externality [*alles Nacheinander und Außereinander*], every difference of time, and indeed everything that the imagination [*Einbildungskraft*]⁷⁷ mixes into thought (S 4: 115). It is difficult to see how *aufheben* could have anything but a negative signification here, for reason does not maintain or elevate, but rather annihilates all differences and conditions.

Thus it is completely senseless to speak of anything outside of reason, just as it is to speak of any internal differences within reason: “Reason is simply one and simply equal to itself [*Die Vernunft ist schlechthin Eine und schlechthin sich selbst gleich*]” (S 4:

the same way that Fichte’s approach to nature is, for it is so self-certain that it does not even entertain the possibility of alterity.

⁷⁷Schelling here inserts a curious footnote, contrasting *Einbildungskraft*, which relates to reason, with *Phantasie*, which relates to the understanding, with no indication of the significance of this distinction (S 4: 115).

116). Its absolute self-identity can never be cancelled (*aufgehoben*), as being pertains to its very essence (S 4: 119). The only thing we can know of this reason, the only unconditioned cognition, is absolute identity, which may be expressed as $A = A$ in the formalized nomenclature Schelling prefers in the *Darstellung* (S 4: 117). In this absolute cognition, all thoughts of particulars vanish, and even subjectivity and objectivity are so in balance (*Gleichgewicht*) that no difference between them is discernible in the absolute identity (S 4: 127). Reason is at once subject and object, cognition and being, with no difference between them. This absolute identity can never cease to be one with itself, and thus it is just as absurd to say that it strives for self-unity as it is to seek a condition for it: “The basic error of all philosophy is assuming that identity emerges from itself and striving [*Bestreben*] to conceptualize this emergence, in whatever way it occurs” (S 4: 120). Though Spinoza had understood the absolute identity by making subject (mind) equal to object (matter), he failed to see, Schelling claims, that the $A = A$ is not the positing of an identity between a previously existing subject and object, but instead divides itself into subject and object sides. Thus there is an $A = A$ conceived subjectively and an $A = A$ objectively, neither one of which assumes subject = object (S 4: 134n). Rather, this and all other expressions of identity are only intelligible on the basis of a fundamental identity that always already unites subject and object.

And yet, in order for the absolute identity to become actual⁷⁸ there must be at least a quantitative⁷⁹ difference between its subjective and objective poles or potencies (S 4:

⁷⁸“Actual” here translates both the German *wirklich* and Latin *actu*, which Schelling uses interchangeably (cf. S 4: 129).

⁷⁹In the Identity Philosophy, a quantitative difference is “a difference that is not posited according to essence . . . a difference that is rooted purely in a difference of form” and not of substance (S 4: 127n). Since all things are identical in reason, all differences are

124-5). The form of the absolute identity only emerges when either subjectivity or objectivity begins to predominate, when a distinction between cognition and being begins to emerge. Actuality thus depends on the disruption of the absolute indifference of reason or the transition from infinite reason to finite subjectivity and objectivity. This transition is the same one that frustrated Schelling throughout his career, and his aim in the Identity Philosophy is to formalize rather than explain it. In the *System of Philosophy in General*, Schelling even suggests that the need to explain the emergence of finitude from the infinite is a sign of our decadent age's entanglement in the understanding. Once we extricate ourselves from "the ultimate question posed by the vertiginous intellect, hovering at the abyss of infinity, 'Why something rather than nothing?', this question will be swept aside forever by the necessity of being, that is, by the absolute affirmation of being in knowledge" (S 6: 155). The Identity Philosophy's certainty in reason forecloses all questioning of the being of reason or individual entities and instead simply assumes that there must be finitude within reason.

But even though this account of the transition from infinity to finitude is purely formal, it does lay the groundwork for Schelling's later, more meaningful treatments of this problem, especially the one found in the *Freedom* essay. The ground of all finitude, Schelling maintains, is the separation of subject and object, which can be expressed as $A = B$ (S 4: 131). This expression, Schelling insists, does not present any different truth than $A = A$, but it does reflect a different power or potency (*Potenz*) of absolute identity.

only quantitative or formal. Schelling's intention in using the modifier is thus to remind the reader that the difference between subject and object is not prior to reason. Esposito calls this point "one of the most crucial and perplexing" in the *Darstellung* (p. 94), and it is difficult to see how the distinction explains the relation between the infinite and the finite any more clearly than Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*.

Whereas in the nature philosophy Schelling had traced nature's development through various stages or potencies, in the *Darstellung* he attempts to do the same without appealing to natural inhibitions. While the absolute remains selfsame, it is articulated according to different exponents or powers (*Potenzen*). Schelling's mathematical metaphor is somewhat of a stretch (since it is unclear what it would mean to multiply the absolute identity by itself a determinate number of times), but it does at minimum show the way in which he intends difference to appear within indifference. Mathematically, any number is raised to the zero power is equal to one, so $A^0 = B$ would indicate that B is an undivided unity, no matter what the value of A happens to be. When A is raised to the first power, however, $A = B$ could represent an infinity of possible values. Thus $A = B$ expresses the first differentiation in absolute identity, the first stage at which it *matters* what the value of A is.

But we need to be careful, Schelling notes, to avoid placing this potency first in a temporal succession. Since absolute identity is necessarily eternal, its potencies also can have no beginning or end. "The mistake of all idealism," presumably including Schelling's earlier undertakings, is to seek to explain the development of the universe through a *succession* of potencies (S 4: 135n). In the Identity Philosophy, there is no movement or conditionality, only differences within indifference. $A = B$ differs from $A = A$ only in that the former expresses a disequilibrium among the opposites. While subject is always the same as object, it is possible for either A or B to be predominant (*überwiegend*), raising reason out of its simple indifference and to its first power. To explain the possibility of this predominance, Schelling revises his concept of force (*Kraft*). Instead of being the plural, necessarily abyssal product of nature that Schelling

described in the *Naturphilosophie*, force is now the “immanent ground of reality” (S 4: 145). As a pure relation of predominance irrespective of internalness or externalness, force is the most basic sort of quantitative difference and thus stands at the base of all differences appearing within the absolute.

The next potency, symbolized as A^2 , is light, which marks a distinction between that which can be identical with it (the transparent) and that which cannot (the opaque). By thus dividing the inner from the outer, the A^2 raises the potency of the absolute identity’s differentiation, hardening the first potency’s play of forces into an eternal duality (S 4: 151). With light, subject and object differ not only through the relative preponderance of one or the other, but through the object’s exclusion from the subject. Light contrasts itself with gravity, which constantly resists light’s drive toward appearing. Where there had previously been only an oscillation between preponderant subjectivity and preponderant objectivity, there now arises an immeasurable gulf between shining ideality and dark reality. Moreover, this separation allows the A^2 to differentiate itself from the mere continuity of the first potency. What in the *Ideas* Schelling had described as a contrast between the understanding and reason he now takes as an internal development from the first potency of reason to the second. Rather than responding to a need or failure in the striving of the first potency (as reason responds to the needfulness of the understanding in the *Ideas*), the second potency develops out of the first through a wholly undetermined (atemporal) act of separation. Reason freely introduces a division, a gap into the being of the absolute to permanently disrupt the continuity of the first potency.

Finally, with the A^3 (which Schelling does not give a natural correlate), reason reaffirms its indifference to this gap. By incorporating the first two potencies into an indifferent totality (*Totalität*), the third potency suspends the quantitative difference introduced by the first two potencies as well as their difference from each other (S 4: 200). At its highest level, the self-identical whole is the same as it is at its lowest: an absolute indifference of and to every opposition. At both the beginning and the end of reason, all distinctions are nothing. Since this potency is the restoration of equilibrium in reason, there can be no more potencies beyond it, and the system is thus closed. The only tasks left for philosophy to perform are describing the natural history of forces and carrying out the analysis of the objective world into infinity—tasks that, viewed absolutely, are wholly meaningless.⁸⁰

The 1804 *System of Philosophy in General* covers the same territory as the *Darstellung*, but since Schelling originally intended it to reach a wider audience—(but then again, there were few audiences narrower than the expected readership of the *Zeitschrift für Spekulative Physik*)—he makes a greater effort to contrast the Identity Philosophy with previous idealistic systems. The *SPG* consequently emerges as Schelling's most thoroughgoing repudiation of idealistic accounts of reason, in which all

⁸⁰In his 1802 *Further Presentation of My System of Philosophy*, Schelling will indicate that he is not satisfied with such a closure of philosophy, criticizing those who “see in the being [*Wesen*] of the absolute nothing but empty night, and can discern nothing in it. It disappears for them into mere negation of difference, and is for itself entirely a privative entity. Therefore, they prudently make it the end of their philosophy” (S 4: 403). While I do not take this, as Michael Vater does (Vater 2004. 197), as evidence that the Identity Philosophy manages to avoid the “night in which all cows are black” problem, it does show that Schelling is already aware of the problem and seeking a philosophy that will not allow all distinctions to dissolve in the absolute.

the negative content that reason had acquired through Kantian criticism, Fichtean striving, and the synthetic method is expunged in favor of a vision of reason as God's pure self-affirmation. The *SPG* begins by announcing that "the first presupposition of all knowledge is that knower and known are the same" (S 6: 137). Yet (as we saw in the *Darstellung*) this presupposition cannot itself presuppose a division between the knowing subject and the known object, for this creates irresolvable difficulties. Either the object determines the subject, in which case the subject can only know the object through its effects; or the subject determines the object, in which case the object as object drops out entirely; or the subject and object reciprocally determine each other, which exposes the subject to both difficulties. Thus if knowledge is possible, thought must be able to grasp the original unity of knower and known without assuming a division of subject and object. As in the *Darstellung*, Schelling names such thinking *reason*, a name which he attempts so far as possible to cleanse of its previous idealistic and human connotations.⁸¹ To distance the Identity Philosophy from nature and transcendental philosophy, Schelling takes pains to note, "By reason, incidentally, I do not merely understand its manifestation and its gradual progress toward self-knowledge in humanity, but reason insofar as it is the universal, true essence and substance of all things" (S 6: 208). And to emphasize his distance from Kant and Fichte, Schelling does not call it a faculty of knowledge or even a form of knowledge, but always simply "knowing" (*Wissen*) or "cognition" (*Erkenntnis*), as when he asks the reader to consider "the opposition between reason and all other

⁸¹This is the role that Schelling had previously assigned to intellectual intuition, which he himself acknowledges (S 6: 153). The move is thus the opposite of Hegel's in the *Differenzschrift*. Whereas Hegel saw that reason (as defined negatively in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and other works in idealism) could not get us to the absolute and thus posited it as a superseded moment of speculation, Schelling expands his concept of reason to include the speculative moment of intuition.

[limited] cognition” (S 6: 142). In particular, he emphasizes that in contrast to reason’s self-recognition of eternal self-identity, “the universality of the understanding remains at all times only a relative universal, as indeed it is capable of uniting the manifold of sensibility only in a relative unity. Meanwhile, the imagination can rise to a totality only by proceeding from the *sensible world*” (S 6: 142). “The sensible world,” however, is a contradiction in terms, for sensation contains no principle of totality, but presumes itself to be a relation of external, fleeting particulars. Likewise, the understanding is purely synthetic (in the sense derided by Hegel in the *Differenzschrift*) insofar as it relates particulars only by incorporating them into an external unity. Thus while reason is not a special power of knowing but absolute knowing itself, the understanding and the imagination, as acts of thought that do relate to external objects, can still be conceived on roughly Kantian lines. Reason, however, is cognition of the eternal—or rather, cognition *as* the eternal—and thus infinitely supersedes and dissolves the fleeting representations of the faculties.

And yet, since “there is nothing eternal, immutable in knowledge except for the very identity of subject and object” (S 6: 141), reason must also be emptier than the other cognitive faculties. Schelling goes on to present most of the propositions from the *Darstellung* about reason’s absolute simplicity, its indivisibility, and so on, but he adds a new determination, which shows nothing but reason’s indeterminateness. The $A = A$ does not express “Subject is equal to object,” but rather, “Affirming affirms itself.” Reason, therefore, is nothing but God’s self-affirmation (S 6: 148). By invoking God here, Schelling dissolves the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. God, the absolute, “is an absolute totality of creative nature,” and a *natura naturata*

opposed to this creativity is inconceivable (S 6: 199). Amazingly, the identity philosophy's solution to Spinoza's riddle, how the infinite is to be connected to the finite, is that there is nothing finite, only the infinite totality. Finitude and difference belong to the non-being of things, and thus cannot be objects of reason. But since there is no cognition other than reason, difference and finitude cannot be thought at all (S 6: 156-7).⁸²

Accordingly, Schelling leaves for the non-philosophical disciplines the study of finite objects, which *are* only insofar as they are negations of the absolute (S 6: 178). Strictly speaking, however, the infinite cannot be negated, for if it is negated even in part, its being as absolute is as a whole annihilated. Thus the project of identifying the infinite and the finite is a non-starter. Strictly speaking, the finite *is* not at all:

Hence there is nothing in the universe or in the absolute as regards its *particularity* or its *mode*; only that is proper to the universe which has been penetrated by the concept of the latter, saturated by infinity, and dissolved into totality. This dissolution is the *true* identity of the infinite and the finite.⁸³ The finite is *only* in the infinite, yet precisely thereby it ceases to exist as the finite. (S 6: 182)

Any attempt to bring the infinite into relation with the finite would have to appeal to the imagination and understanding, faculties that can only obscure the pure thought of reason. Schelling notes that to think a particular plant (for example), we must be careful

⁸²Schelling goes on to argue that the absolute totality of God's self-affirmation is not simply a foundational concept to make the rest of philosophy intelligible, but is the content of philosophy itself: "Philosophy, then, is the presentation of the self-affirmation of God in the infinite fertility [*Fruchtbarkeit*] of its consequences; that is, the presentation of the One as totality" (S 6: 176-7). But the mention of fertility introduces an odd discontinuity into an otherwise continuous line of thought. Suddenly and inexplicably, God's self-affirmation not only begins to consort with something outside of itself but becomes productive in the process.

⁸³The *Toothpaste for Dinner* quip "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the precipitate" seems especially appropriate here.

not to attribute to it more reality than it has, for “the plant is neither real nor something in itself, but it is strictly a concept or a schematism of the imagination” (S 6: 181-2). Such reflective faculties, as Schelling calls them, can only seek the finite’s *synthesis* with the infinite, rather than its *dissolution* into it (S 6: 182). The finite, however, is nothing at all, and consequently the search for such a synthesis is nonsensical. Thus Schelling concludes “that what is genuinely real [*das wahrhaft Reale*] in all things is strictly their *idea*, or the complete ideality of the universal and the particular” (S 6: 183). Here, even in collapsing Kant’s ornate epistemological edifice, Schelling preserves its crown, reaffirming that the highest form of thought is the idea of reason. Kant was the first, he notes, to challenge ordinary reflection and realize that ‘idea’ means something other than ‘concept’ (*Begriff*) or ‘representation’ (*Vorstellung*) (S 6: 186). Specifically, whereas these latter call to mind something other than themselves when they think their object, the idea appeals only to itself. Still, Kant is unable to transcend ordinary reflection, and he cannot help but wonder whether the ideas are mere mental constructs (K B697 ff.). It is quite expected, Schelling thinks, for a philosopher mired in reflection to ask this question, for any honest philosophy that does not begin with absolute knowing seeks a measure by which to ensure that it does not transcend what it is capable of knowing. Yet by asking this question, Kant puts more faith in his own ability to judge when his thinking transcends what it is capable of knowing than he does in the absolute. Rather than a restrained humility, Kantian criticism is the height of humanistic arrogance for not beginning with what is alone self-certain and absolute. Thus Schelling rejects the entire project of critique (at least as fundamental philosophy), calling it the “vain instinct of

selfhood, which converts everything into *its* product” (S 6: 187). True philosophy aims to overcome this instinct by appealing instead to the immediate certainty of the idea.

In contradistinction to the selfsame idea, all individual cognitions dissolve in the idea and exist only as “presentations [*Darstellungen*]” of the universe (S 6: 183)—that is, as “mere appearance [*Erscheinung*] in contradistinction to the idea” (S 6: 187). Though Schelling clearly wants to call attention to a certain falsity, Pfau’s “mere appearance” does not adequately render the German *Erscheinung*. In addition to indicating appearance (and here we could even say *mere* appearance), the word, related to the German *Schein* and the English “shine,” also plays a significant role in Schelling’s aesthetics. In short, it designates the artwork’s ability to present what is inaccessible not only to the understanding, but to all conscious striving for unity with the world. Beyond merely human activity is a type of presentation that presents an infinity untouchable by any determination. Thus we should not be misled into concluding that the *System of Philosophy in General* gives us *only* a night in which all cows are black. There is clearly *some* shining in the land of dark bovinity. Schelling calls the relation between this shining and the true world of the idea “*relucence*⁸⁴ or *reflection* [*Widerschein* oder *Reflex*]” (S 6: 197). The world of finite, determined things, though nothing in itself, is not *absolutely nothing*, for such a determination would make no sense. Since the absolute can contain no negation, finite things can only confront it as images in a mirror, as representations that *shine against* it. The *SPG*’s central move is thus to replace the question, “How does the absolute *become* its finite expression?” with “Why must the absolute be *expressed* as finite?”. While the former question is unanswerable, as it

⁸⁴Pfau’s translation. It is unclear what, if any, difference Schelling wishes to draw between *Widerschein* and *Reflex*.

assumes the finite is determined by the absolute, which by definition cannot determine anything, the second question is relatively simple to answer: “the absolute positing of totality immediately implies a relative nonpositing of the particular as such, . . . whereby the universe is posited as totality and the particular as such is posited as *not real* in respect of the universe” (S 6: 197). Because the absolute does not admit of an articulation of difference, difference must be articulated alongside it in parallel. And the very fact that the positing of nonbeing accompanies the positing of absolute being shows that the positing of nonbeing is itself an expression of the absolute, though in mediated, not in immediate, form. Schelling compares this self-positing with an eye seeing itself in a mirror:

Just as the eye, in beholding its reflection in the mirror, posits itself [and] has an intuition of itself only to the extent that it posits the *reflecting* [medium], the mirror, as nothing in itself, and just as it is effectively one act of the eye, whereby it posits itself, beholds itself, and does not posit or behold the reflecting [medium], so the universe, too, contemplates *itself* by not beholding or positing the particular discretely. (S 6: 197-8).

It is only because non-being reflects the light of the absolute that it appears at all; in itself, it does not shine. Reason is to be identified here not with the eye, but with the knowledge of the identity of the eye and its reflection; “Reason is, so to speak, God’s countenance [*Antlitz*] spread out over the entire universe” (S 6: 207). By placing the shining in the absolute, Schelling self-consciously negates Kant’s doctrine of sensation. While Kant claims that only the sensible can be known, Schelling argues that the products of sensation are the negation of the pure knowledge of the absolute (S 6: 199). Knowledge, consequently, belongs in the supersensible, not in the sensible, though of course the supersensible is not to be determined as in Kant as the negation of the sensible, but as an original indifference to the contradictions that make sensation possible. All of

this is not to deny the reality of reality, but simply to point out that as reality, it is negation.

Yet as Schelling's discussions of the absolute's presentation as reluctance and reflection grow more intricate, they cannot help also becoming more imaginative, which in the *SPG* (given its preference for eternal verities preceding cognitive and intuitive determination) means irrational and unphilosophical. So long as the presentation of the absolute leads us to posit mirrors or anything else opposed to the absolute, they appeal to a synthesis of the finite and infinite and are thus reflective in the pejorative sense. Even provisional oppositions within the absolute are unacceptable, as reason excludes anything but the pure dissolution of the finite. Thus Schelling is forced to reject not only Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, but also his own synthetic method, as following the "vain instinct of selfhood" he finds in critical philosophy. In general, any distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (or activity and productivity, as the nature philosophy frames the opposition) must immediately dissolve. Indeed, it is not even right to call God's self-affirmation an activity, for there is no distinction between God and his being (S 6: 170).⁸⁵ His self-affirmation is pure substance and as such always already self-sufficient and pervasive. It is even less appropriate to conceive of God's self-knowledge as a self-differentiation, for this would be synonymous with productivity, God positing something outside of himself with which he would then be immediately unified (S 6: 170). The absolute needs no mediation to affirm itself. For Fichte, of course, knowledge consists of nothing but the active striving of the self against opposition. Yet here

⁸⁵Hence Schelling is forced to abandon his claim in the *Darstellung* that a quantitative difference between subject and object is necessary for the absolute to become actual (see above). Since actuality and activity are meaningful concepts only as determinations of the absolute, they are purely reflective and have no place in philosophy.

Schelling is emphatic that God's self-affirmative thinking is not an activity but *in the idea* (S 6: 170). The earlier distinction between activity and productivity is missing entirely. Gone is Schelling's assurance that in contrast to products, activity can be something infinite. The Identity Philosophy thus suspends both the infinite productivity of Spinoza's God and the infinite activity of Fichte's practical reason by conceiving reason as pre-active self-affirmation. This reason does not need to strive to be anything other than it is because it is already everything it could possibly be.

Though this suspension of Fichte's infinite striving is in line with the aims of both the *System of Transcendental Idealism* and the *Differenzschrift*, it marked the basis for Hegel's break with Schelling. While we have already seen a difference emerging between Schelling and Hegel's accounts of reason in these earlier works, the *System of Philosophy in General* accentuates this difference to an extent that will ultimately lead Hegel to reject the Identity Philosophy as "the dissolution of everything distinct and determinate, or rather the self-justifying hurling of it into the abyss of vacuity without any further development" (H 9: 17, ¶16).⁸⁶ If absolute knowing is to have any content, in other words, it must arise out of a self-reflection that knows its knowledge is anything but immediate. As such, both the *Differenzschrift* and the *System of Transcendental Idealism* overstated their cases in their efforts to show the emptiness of reflection without the

⁸⁶In a letter to Schelling dated May 1, 1807 Hegel implies that his polemic in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* is aimed not at Schelling, but at the followers who have trivialized his insights (*Briefe*, pp. 159-62). However, this criticism follows the *System of Philosophy in General* so closely that this distinction is justified only if we take the *SPG* itself as one of the works that trivializes the earlier Schelling works that Hegel so respected. After Schelling confronted Hegel about this resemblance in a letter dated November 2, 1807, Hegel never responded.

intellectual intuition of the absolute, “for it is a misapprehension [*Verkennen*] of reason when reflection is excluded from the true and is not grasped as a positive moment of truth” (H 9: 19-20, ¶21). While Hegel still conceives the speculative essential to reason’s vitality, he no longer opposes it to reason, since reflection’s ability to alienate itself from the world, to carve it up into same and other, is also an ineliminable moment in absolute knowing.

Along with this recovery of reflection comes a renewed appreciation of the importance of the understanding. Because spirit must be able to analyze the determinations it gives itself in order to find their flaws, the understanding, as the faculty of breaking down ideas into their simple moments, proves to be indispensable. Amazingly, Hegel goes so far as to assert, “The activity of fissure [*Scheidens*] is the force and work [*Kraft und Arbeit*] of the understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest, or rather the absolute power [*Macht*]” (H 9: 27, ¶32). Whereas there is nothing astonishing about an activity that follows a set pattern and reinforces itself (as, for instance the institution of slavery might), the fact that spirit can break away from such a circle attests to “the tremendous [*ungeheure*] power of the negative (H 9: 27, ¶32). Death, the ultimate possibility of spirit’s non-actuality, threatens reason’s synthetic impulse to the core, and thus “forceless beauty hates the understanding” for exposing it to this infinitely superior force (H 9: 27, ¶32). And yet, “the life of spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it” (H 9: 27, ¶32). Only an effete aesthetic sensibility shrinks from the force of the negative; absolute knowing elects to confront the diremptive force of the understanding in all its tremulousness. This respect for the analytical work of the

understanding stands in sharp contrast not only to the derision of the *Differenzschrift* and the Identity Philosophy, but also to Hegel's later writings, such as when, in the greater *Logic*, he claims the determinations of the understanding amount to nothing and, in the 1820 *Philosophy of Right*, he denies any place for the “dry as dust understanding” in considerations of justice (§217). By giving both reflection and the understanding a place in the dialectic of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel denies the simplicity of intuition and carves out a distinction between reason and absolute knowing.

Thus when Hegel famously criticizes proponents of grounding philosophy in the $A = A$ as hoping “to pit this single insight [*Wissen*], that in the absolute everything is the same, against the full body of articulated cognition, which at least seeks and demands such fulfillment, to palm off its absolute as the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black” (H 9: 17, ¶16), there can be no doubt that he is at odds with Schelling. Whereas in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* absolute knowing is reached only at the end of the dialectic, after spirit has expanded itself to the point where it can realize that it has always been identical with all being, Schelling would maintain throughout his career that any knowing must begin with knowledge of the absolute. The absolute knowing of the Identity Philosophy must be pure affirmation, not negation, for

if the opposition of the subjective and the objective were the point of departure and the absolute merely the product, to be posited only after the fact by way of an annihilation of the opposition, the absolute itself would be a mere negation, namely the negation of a difference of which we would not know whence it comes and why precisely it should serve, by way of its own negation, to demonstrate the absolute. (S 6: 163-4)

It makes no sense, that is, to speak of the absolute as a product of negations, for this introduces differentiation into the undifferentiated. Yet Hegel counters that so long as it does not allow for the incorporation of negations into the absolute, the System of Identity

is nothing but warmed-over Spinozism. No matter how intricately such a system can mirror nature, so long as it involves merely the affirmation of a principle (and not its negation or inhibition), it is merely “a boring show [*Schein*] of diversity” that “remains, in effect, always at its beginning if its development involves nothing more than this repetition of the same formula” (H 9: 17, ¶15). To properly specify what it means for a system to incorporate real negation would require us to work through the entire *Phenomenology*, but in the next chapter I will attempt to show at least what it means for reason to incorporate real negation. For now, though, I just want to note that at minimum it involves overcoming the bare affirmation of Spinozism through the “pure, simple negativity” of a subject that refuses to limit itself to what is merely given. (H 9: 18, ¶17).⁸⁷

Of course, we have already seen in the *Differenzschrift* (and this could also be taken as the lesson of most of the *Phenomenology*) that such pure, simple negativity is insufficient if it cannot reincorporate an absolute affirmation. In the dialectic of reason (as we will see in the next chapter), spirit learns that it is always both active and productive, that there must be a separation between spirit and its actualization if its knowledge is to be anything but empty self-certainty and that this separation must be

⁸⁷To be fair to Schelling, we should note that his reason for dissolving everything into the absolute is different from Spinoza’s. He rightly points out in the *Freedom* essay that beginning philosophy with the simple statement of identity does not entail reducing it to a monolithic whole (S 7: 340-1) and in the Identity Philosophy is careful to distinguish between the A=A and a simple identification of subject and predicate. In contrast, Spinoza made the fundamental mistake of assuming that God = Nature implies that whatever is true of God is true of nature and vice versa. For Schelling, the identity of everything in the absolute is not entailed by the meaning of identity, but by the need for a self-grounding ground that makes all meaning possible. Nevertheless, he is still vulnerable to Hegel’s criticism because the Identity Philosophy ultimately denies the reality of any negation of the absolute.

suspended as spirit comes to feel at home in its own skin and its own actions. But even with this added complexity, the *Phenomenology's* account of reason still remains open to the criticism of the "vain instinct of selfhood" that Schelling lays out in the *SPG*. While Hegel's absolute knowing ultimately suspends the distinction between activity and productivity, it does not go so far as to dissolve activity in the pure indifference of the absolute. Even absolute knowing relies on the activity of spirit, specifically its negation of all determinations that place the actual outside itself. While Hegel demonstrates in the dialectic of active reason that this incorporation cannot be based on a drive or instinct of the self but suspends the self in its very expansion, he does not even consider the possibility of an absolute truly indifferent to the self.

But Hegel was right to point out the profound difficulty of maintaining a philosophy of identity without the dialectical method for introducing difference that Schelling had himself developed in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*. If the goal of a system is to present the absolute in a manner accessible to finite beings, as Schelling first suggested in the *STI* and continued to maintain in his later systems, there must be some account of how the infinite relates (internally or externally) to the finite. But if this relationship consists solely of the dissolution of the finite into the infinite, then every attempt at a system is just as adequate as any other. So long as all specific determinations the system introduces dissolve, any attempt at developing a system will succeed in showing the infinite's relation to the finite. But since this very demonstration, relying as it does on the finite metaphor of dissolution, would itself have to dissolve into the infinite, every system would thus equally undermine its own ground. If the promise of

the ground is to have any meaning, the temporal model of dissolution, that of Chronos devouring his children,⁸⁸ must be equally as incomplete as the Fichtean model of striving.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit's* movement to absolute knowledge, Hegel tries to show exactly this. In order for knowledge truly to be absolute, it must suspend these two closed temporal structures in favor of an open spatial one. By forgiving itself for all its moral transgressions and recognizing that as a temporally finite being it could never treat all other self-conscious beings with the respect they deserve, spirit learns that its absoluteness does not depend on its infinite striving, for as spirit it is already absolute (H 9: 362, ¶671). Then, in the dialectic of religion, spirit learns to suspend its striving for an adequate representation of the absolute. By locating the absolute in an object, an artwork, a body, or a text, spirit places a distance between itself and the absolute to be suspended in absolute knowing. More precisely, spirit learns that as a finite representation, the divine is self-suspending. What is more, the divine (in opposition to the absolute) even expresses the meaning of self-suspension: “The negative of the object, or its self-suspension [*dessen sich selbst Aufheben*] has a positive meaning for self-consciousness [insofar as] self-consciousness *knows* the nothingness of the object” (H 9: 422, ¶788). By presenting the absoluteness of spirit externally, the image of the divine shows self-consciousness both its truth and its freedom to suspend its own access to this truth. Religion is the highest moment of spirit precisely because it can be repudiated in its very affirmation of spirit.

In absolute knowing, this repudiation occurs when all of the various moments of spirit are brought together both as individual, suspended moments and as presentations of

⁸⁸Cf. *Philosophy of Nature*, H 19: 193, §258.

the whole; “by themselves they are single and separate, and it is solely their spiritual unity that constitutes the force [*Kraft*] of this reconciliation” (H 9: 424, ¶793). But what sort of force is this? Clearly it cannot be the sort of force that is the object of the understanding, for this would make the same mistake as Kant’s transcendental deduction of the categories: using the understanding to reflect upon the movement of reason. Stephen Houlgate makes a similar mistake when he argues that the force of the *Phenomenology* is lost if we do not take every transition from one moment of spirit to the next as absolutely necessary. If these transitions were not necessary, he reasons, then they would be the mere imaginings of the phenomenologist (Houlgate 101). But this argument ignores spirit’s self-forgiveness for the limitations of its own thought and thus confuses the limited logic that investigates laws of thought independently of the laws of being with the science or knowing that recognizes the abyss of the understanding and perversity of reason and nevertheless grants itself the right of knowledge.

Instead of such an overpowering force of logic that moves spirit from one moment to the next with ironclad necessity, the absolute’s force of reconciliation must be a suspension of all conceptual compulsion that opens up a space of and for freedom. If the content of absolute knowing “is nothing else than the very movement just expressed” in the course of the *Phenomenology* (H 9: 428, ¶799), then the key to absolute knowing is bringing all the moments of this movement together in such a way that allows for their reconciliation. When each stage is seen as a moment of the whole, there are two possible ways of conceiving their co-presence. From the standpoint of what Hegel calls the “concept” (*Begriff*), the speculative impulse that drives the movement of spirit through its various forms, “the *moments* appear earlier than the completed [*erfüllte*] whole whose

becoming is the movement of these moments” (H 9: 429, ¶801). That is, so long as we look at the moments of spirit from the standpoint of their fulfillment, we see them as incomplete and disparate moments that have yet to be reconciled. “In consciousness, on the other hand, the whole, though uncomprehended [*unbegriffne*], is prior to the moments” (H 9: 429, ¶801). When the reconciliation of spirit’s moments is seen not in terms of the speculative urge for completion, but from the finitude of consciousness, the infinite whole must be taken (as in Schelling’s Identity Philosophy) as prior to the finite moments. But this, too, assumes a directed temporality, for

time is the concept itself that is there [*da ist*] and presents itself to consciousness as empty intuition; for this reason, spirit necessarily appears in time, and it appears in time just so long as it has not *grasped* [*erfaßt*], that is, has not annulled [*tilgt*] time. It is the *outer*, intuited pure self which is *not grasped* [*erfaßte*] by the self, the merely intuited concept; when the latter grasps itself, it suspends [*hebt . . . auf*] its time-form, comprehends [*begreift*] this intuiting, and is a comprehended and comprehending [*begriffnes und begriffendes*] intuiting. (H 9: 429, ¶801)

Thus absolute knowledge suspends the temporality of consciousness along with that of the concept. So long as time still governs experience, either by submitting consciousness to the demand for completion or by positing it as always already submerged in the absolute, spirit is divided against itself and unable to intuit itself fully. “Time, therefore, appears as the destiny and necessity of spirit that is not yet complete within itself” (H 9: 429, ¶801); with its suspension spirit nullifies both the Fichtean striving that submits consciousness to its own perfection and the nihilistic urge to dissolve all finite determination in the infinity of time.

As Hegel describes it, however, the temptation of the concept is far greater than that of the Identity Philosophy’s absolute. Though it is equally problematic to find spirit’s reconciliation in an infinitely distant past as it is to look for it in an infinitely

distant future, the increasing satisfaction spirit finds in determining itself draws it away from the emptiness of its absolute beginning. Thus when Hegel repeats his description of the *Phenomenology*'s final dialectic, this time with spirit as the subject, he emphasizes the dangers of subordinating moments of spirit to the concept over the vacuity of the Identity Philosophy's absolute. Having absolved itself of a destiny outside itself, spirit can now be certain that it is nothing but "*this movement* of the self which empties itself of itself [*sich entäußert*] and sinks itself into its substance, and also, as subject, has gone out of that substance into itself, making the substance into an object and a content at the same time as it suspends this difference between objectivity and content" (H 9: 431, ¶804). Spirit, that is, suspends not only its difference from itself, but also the very possibility of any self-division. But the necessity of expressing this freedom of determination is still left over as a stubborn remainder (H 9: 431-2 ¶805). Since spirit needs some means by which to know itself, it is always dependent upon a phenomenology, a presentation of how it appears to itself. The suspension of *this* need moves us beyond the phenomenology of spirit to what Hegel calls "science":

Whereas in the phenomenology of spirit each moment is the difference of knowledge and truth, and is the movement in which that difference is suspended, science on the other hand does not contain this difference and is its suspension; on the contrary, since the moment has the form of the concept, it unifies the objective form of truth and the knowing self in an immediate unity. (H 9: 432, ¶805)

By taking the concept as primary, science eliminates the ambiguity that allows spirit to see itself either from the standpoint of consciousness sunk in the absolute or as a mere moment of the concept. But choosing the latter is not a solution to the dilemma at all. Science must allow itself to be brought back into consciousness; that is, it must give up the independence of its forms and allow them to be coopted and reappropriated by

consciousness. Ironically enough, “this release of itself from the form of its self is the supreme freedom and assurance of its knowledge of itself” (H 9: 432, ¶806). Absolute knowing depends on spirit renouncing not only the Schellingian need for wholeness, but also the scientific need for purity of science.

“Yet,” Hegel intones, “this externalization is still incomplete; it expresses the *connection* of its self-certainty with the object which, just because it is thus connected, has not yet won its complete freedom. The self-knowing spirit knows not only itself but also the negative of itself or its limit: to know one’s limit is to know⁸⁹ to sacrifice oneself [*sich aufzuopfern*]” (H 9: 433, ¶807). Because the self-certain forms of science can impose excessively rigid restraints on spirit’s thinking, spirit must be able to suspend its connections to these forms, allowing both science and spirit to develop unconstrained according to their respective inner freedom. By disrupting the identity of spirit and the concept, this severing allows spirit to know its limits, its incompleteness, without resubmitting this incompleteness to the concept. Such knowledge is a forgiveness and suspension of the Fichtean I’s perpetual striving to reconcile itself with its world. It is the ultimate sacrifice in that it offers up not only everything by which the self could identify and fix itself, but the very possibility of spirit’s integrity. For the spirit to know its inevitable distance from the concept is for it to know that no concept is absolute, for it to take care not to take itself too seriously.

⁸⁹Miller translates this as “to know one’s limit is to know *how* to sacrifice oneself” (emphasis added). While it could be interpreted this way, the German, “Seine Grenze wissen, heißt, sich aufzuopfern wissen,” does not necessarily suggest that this is a knowing-how. And while it is clear that Hegel believes knowing one’s limits implies knowing that one *must* sacrifice oneself, it is unclear how such knowledge gives it any more *know-how* regarding self-sacrifice.

This self-sacrifice takes the form of a respatialization of spirit's temporality. It "is the externalization in which spirit presents [*darstellt*] the process of its becoming spirit in the form of *free contingent happening*, intuiting its pure self as time outside of it, and equally its being as space" (H 9: 433, ¶807). The fissure in spirit's temporality, the fact that in separating itself from its self it places itself outside of or indifferent to the necessity of time, is a becoming-spatial, a presentation of its being as space rather than time. Thus spirit takes even its becoming, its temporal transition into itself, as something spatial, both in the realm of nature and in that of spirit. In nature, "the externalization of spirit," spirit sees a distance both between itself and its absolute origins (i.e., the inevitable failure of a Schellingian Identity Philosophy) and between its externalization and the concept (i.e., the inevitable failure of a Fichtean teleology of nature). Presenting an equally unbridgeable gulf, "the other side of [spirit's] becoming, history, is a conscious, self-mediating process—spirit emptied out into time; but this externalization is just the same an externalization of itself; the negative is the negative of itself" (H 9: 433, ¶808). Regardless of the fact that history constitutes time, that it is nothing but "spirit emptied out into time," it still must be presented in spatial, not temporal terms to preserve the discontinuities and incompleteness that give it life and disrupt its wholeness: "This becoming presents a slow-moving succession of spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of spirit, moves thus slowly just because the self has to penetrate and digest the entire wealth of its substance" (H 9: 433, ¶808). And this is equally true of the various moments of the *Phenomenology*. Cognition of their wholeness shows that they cannot be reduced to a mere sequence of stages leading to the concept, that their position in the dialectic does not tell us everything we need to know about

them. It forces us to recognize, in short, that none of them can be cognized in their wholeness. And yet, through the effort to recollect or inwardize [*Er-innern*] these moments, spirit reconstructs “the concept’s time” and brings itself ever closer to a community founded upon absolute knowing, a community that would know both its own inner constitution and the need to suspend its drive for complete knowledge of itself (H 9: 433, ¶808).

All this is not to say, however, that Hegel’s reputation as a totalizing thinker is not well-deserved. What is generally called Hegel’s System, the encyclopedic science comprised of the various forms of the *Science of Logic*, *Philosophy of Nature*, and *Philosophy of Spirit*, does not preserve the *Phenomenology*’s emphasis on irreconcilable fissures in knowledge and makes no apologies about calling itself a science⁹⁰ and thereby identifying itself with the concept over consciousness. While Absolute Knowing’s severing of science from phenomenology ought to allow us to develop a science of logic independent of spirit, Hegel does not present the *Encyclopedia* or any part of it as merely a shadow-regime to the *Phenomenology*. Thus it should be unsurprising that the System favors the destining structure of time over the openness of space.⁹¹ Whereas the

⁹⁰In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, Hegel also calls his work a “science” (e.g., H 9: 11, ¶5), but there he is contrasting his work with that of others who invoke a vague “intellectual intuition” to avoid the labor of the negative. According to these fanatics, “what is required in the presentation of philosophy is, from their viewpoint, rather the opposite of the form of the concept” (H 9: 12, ¶6). The fact that the discipline of the concept is necessary to overcome such lazy intuition does not imply that such discipline is already absolute knowledge.

⁹¹This preference was the basis of Feuerbach’s influential criticism of the Hegelian system. By privileging the totalitarian movement of time over the liberality of space, Feuerbach argues, Hegel’s system ignores the natural foundations upon which it depends, making conflicts and contradictions out of potentially reconcilable differences (Feuerbach 3: 36). The respatialization of Hegel’s absolute knowing, I would counter, is intended to address precisely this illiberality. The final step of the *Phenomenology of*

Phenomenology ends with a spatiality indifferent to either the standpoint of consciousness or the that of the concept, Hegel's system prioritizes the speculative directionality of the concept. This difference is especially apparent in the *Philosophy of Nature*, which inverts the *Phenomenology*'s prioritization of space over time by making time the fulfillment of space. There Hegel defines space as the most primitive stage of nature, "the abstract *universality of Nature's self-externality*, self-externality's mediationless indifference. It is a wholly ideal *side-by-sideness* because it is self-externality; and it is absolutely *continuous*, because this asunderness is still quite *abstract*, and contains no specific difference within itself" (H 19: 189, §254). As pure externality, space contains no moment of reconciliation; rather, the various parts of space, "the heres[,] are side-by-side and do not interfere with each other" (H 19: 190, §254 *Zusatz*). The fracturedness that Hegel wants to preserve in the *Phenomenology* is here taken as a mere privation.

Time, on the other hand, as "the existence of this perpetual self-suspension," ensures that its moments replace and annul one another (H 19: 192, §257 *Zusatz*). By introducing negativity, the possibility of one of its moments canceling another, time "shows itself to be the truth of space" (H 19, 192, §257 *Zusatz*). Time is not to be taken as space's mere complement, but space must, through its own inner logic, turn into time: "In representational thinking, space and time are taken to be quite separate: we have space and *also* time; philosophy fights against this 'also'" (H 19: 192, §257 *Zusatz*). Philosophy, or at least a philosophical science in accord with the concept, cannot accept the co-presence of time and space. Rather, it aims to show that the destining structure of

Spirit is the affirmation of suspended moments of spirit as not simply past, but operative as loci of difference.

time eliminates the openness of space. Both time and space, however, are entirely subordinate to the concept. It is the concept that determines their being, and they have no say over the absoluteness of the concept (H 9: 193, §258 *Anmerkung*). Despite his vigorous protestations in the *Differenzschrift* and *Phenomenology* against Fichte's elevation of reason over its other, Hegel has replaced Schelling's totalized reason of the Identity Philosophy with the totalitarian reason of the concept.

Chapter 5: Suspended Reason

“Now that self-consciousness is reason, its hitherto negative relation to otherness turns round into a positive relation.” (H 9: 132, ¶232)

With this announcement near the beginning of the *Phenomenology*'s chapter on “Reason,” Hegel lays out both reason's task and the dialectical inertia impeding its fulfillment. Unlike in the Identity Philosophy, reason is not the prereflective identity of spirit with its other, nor is it the unity of the concept that has brought all otherness into itself. Rather, it is a *relation* to its other, and at that a *positive one*, one that starts out with the simple certainty that it is somehow the same as its other and must learn how to affirm the other as other, to know the truth of its relation to the other. But in contrast to absolute knowing, reason still sees itself as a “now.” “Now that self-consciousness is reason,” now that it is no longer merely self-consciousness sunk in a negative relation to the other and has shifted to a mode of being that aims to find itself in the world, it views its previous moments (to the extent that it remembers them at all) as superceded, as things of the past.

Thus the dialectic of reason presents the adolescence of the *Aufhebung* itself. Not yet able to suspend flawed moments without losing them, it is forced to come to terms not only with its other, but with its own negativity and non-absoluteness. As Hyppolite helpfully clarifies, the reason of the *Phenomenology* is not the totalized reason of the System, but a mere moment of absolute knowing:

What is the difference between reason in the 1807 *Phenomenology* and reason in the System? In the System, reason is genuinely the identity of in-itself and for-itself. Consequently, from then on phenomenal consciousness is *transcended*. But in the 1807 work reason is the phenomenal manifestation of reason, and consequently the unity of in-itself and for-itself is envisaged as it appears, still *for-itself*, to human

consciousness. Only at the end of the work, in the dialectic of the remission of sins, is the “internal opposition of the concept” genuinely surmounted. (Hyppolite, p. 222n)

As part of phenomenal consciousness, reason in the *Phenomenology* is always transcending its limitations and being transcended as itself limited, but it will never have achieved total transcendence, if such a notion is even conceivable. Lacking both religious consciousness’s sense for the necessity of reconciliation and the spatiality to achieve this reconciliation, it struggles through a dialectic of alterity and transcendence. But to say that reason is a mere moment in absolute knowing’s gallery of shapes is not to place it as one part or aspect of knowing alongside, for example, the understanding and religion’s “representational thinking.” In his critique of psychology Hegel mocks the crude epistemology that can only identify a “collection” of faculties “as if in a sack” (H 9: 169, ¶303). Nor is it right to assume, as Schelling’s Nature Philosophy does, that reason incorporates “lower” forms of thinking (like the understanding and imagination) into itself through a dialectical move to unity, for in its observation of self-consciousness reason learns that any such integration must be left unfinished. The sense in which reason stands alongside other moments in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can only be appreciated through the dialectic of reason’s encounter with its other, in which reason learns that its unity with the world is always characterized by a self-absorbed perversity (*Verkehrtheit*).

As one of only two moments in the *Phenomenology* (the other being absolute knowing) when spirit recollects and internalizes (*er-innert*) the progress of its own formation (*Ausbildung*), the chapter on reason is where most of the development of the need for and structure of spirit’s self-preservation occurs, in particular where spirit learns

that “the exposition of the untrue consciousness in its untruth is not a merely *negative* procedure” (H 9: 57, ¶79). While every movement of the *Phenomenology* shapes the whole, to such an extent even that it is impossible to give a complete phenomenological analysis of any given moment, reason lends the very structure of the movement from one form of consciousness to the next (Hyppolite 246). Essential in this development is reason’s coming to terms with the temporal structure of acting. Hyppolite puzzles over the apparent contradiction that spirit eliminates the time in which it manifests itself (p. 45), but with the movement into space, we can see that this is not a contradiction at all. Absolute knowing is not the elimination of time, but its suspension, its cancellation as the filicidal Chronos and preservation as indifferent space. Yet Hyppolite is exactly right that “To surmount all transcendence and yet to preserve the life of spirit presupposes a dialectical relation between the temporal and the supertemporal which cannot easily be thought” (p. 46). The dialectic of reason lays the groundwork for absolute knowing’s suspension of temporality by showing both the inevitability and the perversity of the need to transcend oneself and the world.

But this is also not to say that reason comes to know itself through an organic-teleological process or that reason’s self-knowledge unfolds in a lawlike fashion. Klaus Düsing is right that Hegel takes reason to be something adaptive and animate as against those like Schiller, Hamann, and Herder who saw it as abstract and lifeless (Düsing, p. 144), but we need to be careful not to infer that reason is therefore something living and organic. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, life is not simply a metaphor for Hegel and Schelling, but a condition for the possibility of meaning (and hence for metaphor), one which (like all of knowledge’s conditions of possibility) must be suspended for

knowledge to be absolute. On its way to absolute knowing reason must ultimately suspend itself as organic, and also as ideal, human, and active.

Thus it is fitting that the transition to the *Phenomenology's* chapter on "Reason," like the final move to absolute knowing, is also occasioned by a sacrifice. To unburden itself of an infinite striving to unite itself with the infinite, the finite self-consciousness posits another self-conscious mediator⁹² who can bridge this infinite gulf. Having handed over responsibility for this infinite striving, the unhappy consciousness "frees itself from action and enjoyment so far as they are its own" (H 9: 130, ¶228). Yet this ascetic self-consciousness finds that even after placing its decisions and possessions in the hands of another, even with "the certainty of having truly divested itself of its 'I,' and of having turned its immediate self-consciousness into a thing," it has not dissolved itself in the absolute (H 9: 130, ¶229). For in sacrificing its self-determination, its possessions, and even its claim to know the reasons for its sacrifices, the unhappy consciousness nevertheless maintains a sense that it does all of this on behalf of the absolute, that its actions do not in fact amount to nothing, but are the activity of the absolute. Moreover, in allowing its desires and actions to be governed by another particular self-consciousness, it learns that not all determination is heteronymous and a particular self-consciousness can itself be absolute. By giving up its duty of infinite striving, self-consciousness affirms itself as having value in itself.

⁹²Hegel's use of the term "sacrifice" here is all the more ironic, given that commentators have generally identified this mediating figure as the priest of medieval Catholicism (cf. Q. Lauer 117 ff.). Thus the transition to reason advances an implicit critique of organized religion. While the church claims to be the embodiment of Jesus's sacrifice, it itself calls for a sacrifice, which, in turn, pushes the self-consciousness away from the one-sidedness of the church and into the self-assured, though anxious, contentment of reason.

The self-affirmation of this sacrifice carries directly over into reason, which Hegel initially defines as certainty of one's identity with the absolute, or in his logical jargon, the "category" or "unity of self-consciousness and being" (H 9: 134, ¶235). No longer struggling with the absolute other for dominance or subjugating itself to it, reason is "at peace" with the world and takes up the position of idealism,⁹³ which holds "that everything actual is none other than itself" (H 9: 132, ¶232). At first, however, such dogmatic idealism is entirely empty, for its self-knowledge consists merely in the assertion that anything outside of its cognition is "non-being." It must learn that its true content consists not in its *being* reality, but "through becoming this reality, or rather demonstrating itself to be such" (H 9: 133, ¶233). If reason affirms its identity merely through assertion, by saying, for example, "I am I, my object and my essence is I," then it assumes a self-consciousness opposed to itself who can understand its assertion (H 9: 134: ¶234). This I is therefore absolute only insofar as it withdraws from other beings, and thus it only achieves its truth with reflection. Whereas in the *Difference* essay Hegel had at times used the term 'reflection' as a synonym of ratiocination, indicating reason that has been reduced to a mere instrument, here Hegel means it in a sense much closer to how he defines it in the greater *Logic*, as a movement of thought in which the object opposed to this movement is posited as mere seeming (*Schein*) (H 11: 249). Reflection is a mode of reason stripped of its historicity, which seeks to ground itself in a turn into itself instead of understanding its place in history. Yet unlike idealism, reflection is not a theoretical paradigm or attempt at a system that can fail to live up to its promises. It is,

⁹³Since this idealism is ultimately suspended in the dissolution of reason's self-certainty, we should therefore note that the *Phenomenology* cannot be taken to show the truth of idealism any more than it shows the truth of, say, the Kantian thing-in-itself or animism. All present moments of spirit's unfolding, but none are able to present its absoluteness.

like reason, a moment in the unfolding of consciousness. The reality with which reason in its immediate certainty identifies itself is a mere abstraction of reality (H 9: 134, ¶235).

The first way that reason attempts to give its self-certainty content is to take the objects of experience as the whole of reality. This reason is conscious of itself as an empiricism, which asserts itself abstractly to be all reality, but flounders when it attempts to specify how it is one with its experiences. Without mentioning Berkeley by name, Hegel ridicules “the empty idealism that grasps reason only as it first comes on the scene [*wie sie sich zunächst ist*] and fancies that by pointing out this pure ‘mine’ of consciousness in all being, and by declaring all things to be sensations or representations, it has demonstrated this ‘mine’ of consciousness to be complete reality” (H 9: 136, ¶238). Such simplistic idealism is the positive counterpart to the scepticism Hegel had explored earlier. Instead of defining itself solely through its negations of the infinite differences it encounters, it sees itself as the affirmation of these manifold differences. But without a way to think the difference of these differences, it is just as vulnerable to self-doubt as skepticism. Until it can find a way to see itself simultaneously as unity of apperception and as a thing [*Ding*],⁹⁴ it remains mired in contradiction (H 9: 136, ¶238). Far from resting content with its own identity with reality, this initial abstract reason “remains a restless searching and in its very searching declares that the satisfaction of *finding* is a sheer impossibility” (H 9: 137, ¶239). To overcome this despair, reason will be forced to

⁹⁴Two paragraphs earlier, Hegel clarifies that in reason, “we can, strictly speaking, no longer talk of *things* at all, i.e. of something which would be for consciousness merely the negative of itself” (H 9: 135: ¶236). Thus reason’s search for itself in the things of empirical nature contradicts its own assumptions. The lone postulate of observing reason, that it is identical with all reality, assumes that there *is no such thing* as a thing. In taking itself to be identical with a thing like the skull, reason ultimately sacrifices this postulate and allows that it, too, is in some ways a thing.

suspend its artificial conceptions of what constitutes finding itself and recognize its presence in the very bones that confine it.

This coming-to-know-itself, however, is not simply an oscillation or struggle. As a slave, self-consciousness learned that it could find itself in work, in shaping its external environment (H 9: 119: ¶196). Through experimentation, reason now shapes its environment in an ideal way, hypothesizing laws and testing them actively (H 9: 137, ¶240). Its relation to nature, which it only provisionally posits as its “other” (for it is certain of its unity with its other), is one of “general *interest*” (H 9: 137, ¶240). The world confronts and attracts reason, but not in a way that genuinely challenges it. Though this empiricist, *observing* reason professes that it wants to learn not about itself, but about the essence of things, it can do so only because it does not realize that its conception of things puts itself in doubt. Its interest in things is merely an evasion of its own emptiness, for “even when reason digs into the very entrails of things and opens every vein in them so that it may gush forth to meet itself, it does not attain this joy; it must have completed itself inwardly before it can experience its consummation [*Vollendung*]” (H 9: 138, ¶241). A course of action more in accord with its self-concept would be first to find itself in its own interiority and only then to seek out expressions of reason outside. But rather than developing a (Schellingian) account of self and nature from out of the very concept of reason as identity with all reality, reason in Hegel’s narrative loses itself in the contingency of natural things. Whereas both Schelling’s synthetic method and his axiomatic Identity Philosophy limit themselves to reason’s inner necessity, the *Phenomenology* describes what happens when reason encounters its own contingency. In learning that what it supposes to be things are nothing but concepts,

reason demonstrates its own limitations and thingly quality (H 9: 139, ¶242). The ultimate lesson of observing reason is thus that reason can comprehend its necessity only through an encounter with this contingency.

Before turning its gaze on itself, reason first posits nature as its object. Initially nature is taken as something devoid of conceptual determination, indifferently flitting upon sense organs and coyly fleeing reason's grasp. But since it has already learned in the dialectic of consciousness that a pure particular is unintelligible, reason searches for a universal in its sense impressions. In so doing, it abandons the universal "mineness" of the objects of consciousness and seeks to conform to the universals present in nature (H 9: 139, ¶245). But in reason's consequent activity of *describing* and *ordering* nature in terms of universals, each object loses its interest for reason as soon as it has been labeled, forcing reason to seek out ever new objects or plunging it into endless redescriptions and retaxonomizations. As these taxonomies become more and more intricate, they lose their sense of a natural order and lead reason to suspect that nature's universals are nothing more than a doubling of its own activity (H 9: 140, ¶246). To be certain that it is giving a true account of empirical reality and not just an arbitrary expression of itself, reason must be sure that the differences it describes are present in nature. It accordingly seeks out those ways in which natural beings actively distinguish themselves from one another, the claws and teeth of animals or the sexual differentiation of plants, for instance. In so doing, reason retraces what is decisive for its own constitution. In animals' struggle for dominance, reason recalls the struggles of self-consciousness, as it recalls in the lives of plants the even more basic self-division making it a desiring being. By seeking out the

elements of its constitution in external nature, reason begins a process of remembering (*erinnern*) itself that will only be complete in absolute knowing.

The very fact that these grounds of distinction are external to what reason would expect merely from its self-unfolding reassures reason, for it thereby learns that its knowledge is something more than its own internal development (H 9: 142, ¶249). But insofar as this self-seeking “instinct” leads reason to focus on primitive features of its own self-consciousness, it disregards everything below the most basic, botanical form of self-consciousness. Its empiricist convictions, however, do not allow it to ignore that organisms rely on and are structured through processes that have nothing to do with their self-differentiation. The chemical basis of organisms initially “confuses cognition” in the same way that physical nature taken merely as a thing does (H 9: 141, ¶246). Because these chemical processes do not show the self-organization of plant and animal life, reason again has to ask whether any structure it observes belongs to nature itself or whether it is imposing its form on its other. While reason finds the origins of its constitution in organic life, it is forced to admit that nature is fundamentally indifferent to self-consciousness, and the similarities that reason finds are mere traces of itself.

Reason is thus forced to examine its own cognition, in which it finds a maze of contingencies. Hegel is doubtlessly thinking of Hume when he notes that the mere analogy of empirical instances does not yield certainty of a law (H 9: 143, ¶250). While the assertion that a dropped stone will fall does not require the observer to drop every stone, reason does not understand the basis for such necessity. It cannot be the mere similarity of stones, for we can observe many objects in nature that initially seem analogous but reveal themselves to behave differently. Prefiguring the work of Carl

Hempel (pp. 11 ff.), Hegel notes that “the instinct of reason does in fact take such laws for truth” (H 9: 143, ¶250). That is, though reason does not claim certainty for any particular law, it is willing to provisionally defend theories that experimentation has successfully verified. The observation of nature thus cannot be a mere matter of making inferences, but entails an active participation in nature. Such activity cannot be reduced to mere falsification of theories (as Karl Popper has advocated [pp. 33 ff.]), as even withholding judgment regarding unfalsified theories assumes a certainty of its own place as observer. Theoretical activity is simultaneously affirming and negating, comparing observed data with theoretical predictions.

As this process of testing laws grows more developed, the object begins to disappear under the theoretical gaze. At the beginning of the experimental process, “the law presents itself in an impure form, enveloped in a single, sensuous form of being, and the concept constituting its nature is immersed in empirical material” (H 9: 143, ¶251). As this law is tested under various conditions, however, the conceptual structure of these conditions becomes more important to the observation than the material itself. Hegel gives the examples of resin-electricity and glass-electricity, which successive experimentation shows not to be confined to these particular materials. To unite the conditions under which the two forms of electricity appear in various materials, observation describes them as negative and positive electricity. And since electricity can behave similarly to magnetism under certain conditions, observation posits electromagnetism, a phenomenon further removed from resin and glass. The end of this increasing mediation of the experience of nature, which can be seen all the more starkly in twentieth century quantum physics (see Arendt 265 ff.), is to eliminate the sensuous

side of the law and replace it with *pure law*, an expression entirely created by reason and hence entirely transparent and accessible to it. Reason, that is, aims to find itself by creating a second nature purified of the otherness of sensuous nature.

While in light of twentieth century science the most obvious candidate for a pure law is the elusive “theory of everything,” which would unite the purely formal aspects of quantum mechanics and relativity theory, Hegel also considers the possibility that an organism might be seen as a pure law. If a pure law is one that, while present in sensuous nature, is not constrained by it, this should make any being that organizes matter to its purposes a candidate. But reason soon realizes that organic nature does not live up to the criteria for a pure law, for organisms never develop solely in accord with a law, but are conditioned both by each other and by the inorganic world. These conditions, however, cannot themselves be united under a single law, for there is no necessity or predictability in the relations of organisms’ structures (or in Hegel’s language, their concepts) to their environments. While animals that live in the air tend to be bird-shaped and ones that live in the sea fish-shaped, there is no universal law here, nor is there a set of identifiable conditions that could determine how an environment shapes an organism (H 9: 145-6, ¶255). Clearly, recent evolutionary biology and ecology has done a far better job of theorizing the relations between organisms and their environments than Hegel thought possible. But most of these discoveries depend on treating organisms not as pure laws, but as carriers of genetic information—that is, as theoretical objects whose matter is to be replaced by conceptual determinations of their conditions. The activity of these sciences is thus more of a creation of a second nature than an observation of organic life *qua* organic. Though this reduction of the organism represents a tremendous step forward

with respect to observing reason's goal of uniting all phenomena under a pure law, it is a step back with respect to the theoretical cognition of self-consciousness.

If the organism cannot be understood as a pure law, reason next considers it as a teleological being. If every organism can be influenced from without, and if these influences cannot be brought under a general law of the organic, then perhaps the general law of the organic rests not in their environments, but in their teleological activity. The principle of organic life thus is primarily self-preservation and only secondarily adaptation. But since reason has not yet learned how to make self-consciousness an object of observation, it cannot yet conceive how an end is to be united with an observed being. It still conceives of end and existence independently and thus fails to see the necessity of their connection—why, for instance, it is any more essential to the being of a cork tree to grow, photosynthesize, and reproduce than it is for it to be carved up to stop wine bottles (Stern 108). Reason fails to realize that the structure of organic teleology is identical with that of self-consciousness: “Just as the instinct of the animal seeks and consumes food, but thereby brings forth nothing other than itself, so too the instinct of reason in its searching finds only reason itself” (H 9: 147, ¶258). Until reason becomes conscious of this constitutive drive, it can only conceive of an end as an external thing. Thus it takes the organism's end as something merely external to the organism and the organism itself as nothing but the singularity lying between the positing of the end and its fulfillment. Since the organism has no other determination, not even a determinate means by which to reach its goal of survival, it is “not even a machine, for this has a purpose, and its activity therefore a specific content” (H 9: 148, ¶260). So conceived, the

activity of the organism would be pure immediacy, pure singularity, with nothing binding it to its own need for survival.

In order to draw such a connection, reason posits a more complicated form of teleological organic activity. Organisms do not simply aim at their own survival, but are composed of the drives of sensibility, irritability, and reproduction. Recall that this is precisely the development that Schelling traces in the *Erster Entwurf* from the pure activity of the organism to activity inhibited by the three basic organic drives. But whereas Schelling framed this development as the inhibition of reason as it is expressed in nature, Hegel describes it as a complication in reason's cognition of nature. Yet even still, Hegel recognizes that these are not merely cognitive forms that reason imposes on nature (as are the laws its experiments are designed to test), but foreshadowings of the structure of reason itself:

Now, as regards these moments themselves, they are directly derived from the concept of "end-in-itself," of a being whose end is its own self. For sensibility expresses in general the simple concept of organic reflection-into-self, or the universal fluidity of this concept. Irritability, though, expresses organic elasticity, the capacity of the organism to *react* at the same time that it is reflected into itself, the actualization which is opposed to the initial resting *being-within-self*, an actualization in which that abstract being-for-self is a being-*for-another*. Reproduction, however, is the action of this *whole* organism reflected into itself, its activity as in itself an end, or as *genus*, in which the individual repels itself from itself, and in the procreative act reproduces either its organic members or the whole individual. (H 9: 150, ¶266).

In these basic organic drives, reason finds not only its reflection, but its constitution.

Like reason, every animal⁹⁵ can only relate to others on the condition of a self-restoring inner life (sensibility). Yet this activity is not simply self-serving, but can fulfill a function in its environment (irritability) and even produce a reflection of its inner activity

⁹⁵Hegel suggests these drives exist only inchoately in plants (H 9: 150, ¶266).

in the external world (reproduction). Without such externalization the organism would remain incomplete, striving against the external world for nothing in particular.

These drives, however, are not something for which laws are adequate. For the only propositions able to formalize the relations between the various drives are ones such as, “An animal’s sensibility is inversely proportional to its irritability,” which say no more than such everyday tautologies as “The size of a hole is inversely proportional to the amount of dirt that has not yet been removed from it” (H 9: 152-3, ¶271). Because the conditions of these drives cannot be investigated without losing sight of the free activity that makes them drives, they cannot be formalized and remain expressions of organic activity. In this formal poverty, reason learns to suspend its drive to produce and test laws. In organic beings, the distinction between concept and existence (upon which law-testing is predicated) drops out, for “what is essential in organic being, since it is in itself the universal, rather consists in general in its moments being equally universal in actual existence, i.e. in their being pervasive processes but not in giving an image of the universal in an isolated thing” (H 9: 154, ¶277). Once reason no longer sees the individual (organism) as reflecting an abstract universal object of observation, but as putting into action its own universal, the need to isolate aspects of the universal in the individual is suspended, and law-testing becomes only one of several means of observing nature.

Although reason is now convinced of the need to suspend its law-making activity, it is not yet ready to suspend observation entirely. Thus it is left with the problem of how to observe these organic drives which have just been posited as universal. Any hypothesized connection between the drives and anatomical systems (such as linking

sensibility with the nervous system, irritability with the musculature, and reproduction with the entrails) is soon found to be superficial, as registering environmental changes or externalizing oneself can manifest itself in a variety of different physiological ways and there are entire anatomical systems that have no obvious relation to the three drives (H 9: 155, ¶276). Drawing connections between these inner drives and their outer manifestation is thus mere play (*Spiel*), which fails to satisfy reason's serious need to find itself in the empirical world. While it strongly hints at connections between the structures of organisms and the structure of reason, such a development of reason along the lines of Schelling's nature philosophy remains limited: "here observation cannot do more than to *make clever remarks, indicate interesting connections, and assume a friendly approach to the concept*" (H 9: 166: ¶297). While this characterization is unfair to Schelling himself, given that the *Naturphilosophie* assumes no such division between observation and the development of reason in nature, it does identify the young Schelling's unique contribution to the development of reason: Schelling establishes a friendship between nature and the concept that must be suspended in absolute knowing. In order to recognize the limitations of observation, scientific reason must suspend such playful remarks and connections, but ultimately such playfulness should also be preserved if spirit is ever to come to terms with nature. Though such "childlike friendliness is childish if it wants to be, or is supposed to be, valid in and for itself," insofar as this need for validity is itself a form of childishness, a relation of mutual play can prove beneficial (H 9: 166, ¶297). In other writings Hegel also calls nature the childhood of spirit (e.g., lesser *Logic*, §24; *Philosophy of Nature*, §248), and we see most

clearly in Schelling that relating to this child entails not only paternalistic discipline but friendly play.⁹⁶

But reason cannot be satisfied with mere play, as it still conceives itself as working toward self-fulfillment. Given that observation cannot find any specific correlates to the drives it posits, it “follows that in existence in its structured shape, observation can become reason only as *life in general*, which, however, in its differentiating process does not actually possess any rational ordering and arrangement of parts” (H 9: 165, ¶295). For reason either identifies observable natural sequences in which it fails to find itself, or it finds itself in a rational nature whose sequence is entirely opaque to it. Thus “organic nature has no history; it falls from its universal, from life, directly into the singleness of existence . . . because the whole is not present in it, and is not present in it, because here it is not *qua* whole *for itself*” (H 9: 165-6, ¶295). The Schellingian project of tracing the unfolding of reason in nature cannot be taken entirely seriously because nature retreats from every effort of reason to find itself in it. In contrast to reason’s instinctive efforts to remember its own history (that is, its own constitution as temporally conceived), nature is a realm of constant forgetting. Rather than pulling itself into unity with a guiding concept, (organic) nature allows its essence as life to dissolve in its pure activity. If reason posits a world-soul in which all of life’s potencies develop according to the concept, it can specify nothing more about this world-soul than its universality (H 9: 166, ¶297).

Because reason cannot find a fully rational order in nature, it seeks one in its purported origin: self-consciousness. Whereas in inorganic nature reason found an

⁹⁶For a sympathetic treatment of Schelling’s philosophy as “playing at work,” see Wirth 2003, 131ff.

external manifestation of itself, but not one that reflected the interiority of things, in organic nature it found beings whose inner nature accorded with the structure of self-consciousness, but in a way that could not be observed; only in observing self-consciousness itself does reason observe a being that is rational both for itself and for reason (H 9: 167, ¶298). Reason first attempts to observe self-consciousness through discovering the laws of thought, and as in its observation of nature, it begins with a purely abstract conception of its field: in this case the logical rules that govern all movements of thought. In order to capture what is universal in all thought, reason seeks universally valid inferences, logical forms that exist in pure repose, indifferent to any thinker or thought. Whereas reason recognizes itself as (re-)constructing the laws of nature, it sees logical laws as merely given, as *found* (H 9: 167, ¶300). But as decontextualized found objects, these laws are contents looking for form more than forms without content: “In point of fact, these laws are not the truth of thought, not because they are supposed to be merely formal, and to possess no content, but rather for the opposite reason, namely, that they are supposed in their determinateness, or just *as a content* from which form has been removed, to rank as something absolute” (H 9: 168, ¶300). Since reason does not investigate the place of these logical forms within thinking, they show only the pure thatness of thought without identifying its formal role in human life. When reason searches for regularities in the formal laws of thought, it must settle instead for mere formal parallels between judgments that explain nothing about the inferences that self-consciousness actually makes.

To bridge the disconnect between these pure forms of thought and their role in human life, reason turns next to psychology in an effort to understand human action in

general. The central problem of psychology, Hegel claims, is to show how a self-conscious being who is influenced by his⁹⁷ environment nevertheless acts spontaneously to satisfy his desires (H 9: 169, ¶302). Ideally psychology would be able to explain both how individuals shape themselves in response to their environments and how they shape their environments in response to their desires, but when it actually investigates these desires, it finds a tangled mess of “faculties, inclinations, and passions,” which cannot be generalized into a general theory of desire and receptivity without sacrificing the restless movement of actual human mental life (H 9: 169, ¶303). This is all the more frustrating because reason instinctively holds self-consciousness to be a unity, an intuition which all the observations of psychology seem to mock. If reason tries to fix upon some of these movements, it finds a study “much less interesting even than enumerating the types of insects, mosses, etc.” because these at least are not assumed to have the unity of self-consciousness (H 9: 169, ¶304). In contrast, to treat self-consciousness by taxonomizing psychological phenomena strips it of its intelligence, the only thing distinguishing it from mosses and insects. Thus even if psychology could find a universal law of psychology linking the desires of self-consciousness with the circumstances in which it finds itself and the actions it takes, it still could not account for the fact that the individual determines what will have an influence on him and what kind of influence this will be (H 9: 170, ¶306). Since individuals can always choose whether to allow an influence (*Einfluß*) to flow in (*einfließen*) upon its motivations for acting, the laws of psychology

⁹⁷Since *Individuum* is neuter in German, Hegel does not use the masculine pronoun as I do here. But in English the neuter is inappropriate here, since *qua* object of reason the self-conscious individual is not an abstraction like “consciousness” or a super-individual entity like spirit, but (in a yet to be clarified sense) a human being. Still, it is not quite right to determine the individual with a masculine pronoun, since sexual difference does not become relevant in spirit’s relation to self-consciousness until Chapter 6.

are never universal or necessary. Recalling his criticisms of idealistic nature philosophy, Hegel mocks those who imagine the individual as a reflection of his world: if the individual could be understood solely from a knowledge of the circumstances in which he finds himself, then

“[w]e should have a double gallery of pictures, one of which would be the reflection of the other: the one, the gallery of external circumstances marked by complete determination and circumscription, the other, the same gallery translated into the form in which those circumstances are present in the conscious being [*Wesen*]: the former the spherical surface, the latter the center which represents [*vorstellt*] that surface within it” (H 9: 170, ¶306).

Such an image of simple reflection or translation shows reason at its laziest. To posit self-consciousness as a mirror of nature and nature as a mirror of self-consciousness is to recognize the necessary presence of reason in its environment while refusing to come to terms with this implicit unity. Reason cannot be satisfied with such a mere setting-beside-one-another without sacrificing its need for a true unity with its object.

Once observing reason learns the futility of treating individuals as reflections of something general—be it sub-human faculties or inclinations or super-human environmental conditions—it comes to focus on the individual himself as the proper object of observation. But still it must discover how the individual’s interiority is to be observed, or how to link observable objects with the essence of the individual. The most obvious way to know the individual, Hegel notes, is through his actions or speech: for in each of these we find his internal being expressed externally (H 9: 173, ¶312). But it is precisely in these two most transparent means of knowing a person that the distinction between the internal and the external breaks down: “Speech and work are outer expressions in which the individual no longer keeps and possesses himself within

himself, but lets the inner get completely outside of him, leaving it to the mercy of something other than himself” (H 9: 173, ¶312). Since speech and action can be interpreted in infinitely many ways, even individuals who try to express themselves honestly can fail to do so. What makes actions and speech expressions of an individual thus dissolves as soon as it is externalized; there is a space between the individual and his expression. But at the same time, the externalized speech or action is too close to the individual’s interiority because there is no distinction between the individual and his expression. When observing reason takes an individual’s speech or work seriously, it cannot discern how these expressions are related to the individual other than by positing a simple identity of the two.

Given this inability to find verifiable laws through direct observation of speech and action, reason realizes that an adequate understanding of self-consciousness requires a recognition of its opacity and thus turns to the pseudosciences⁹⁸ of physiognomy and phrenology, each of which assumes that self-consciousness is not immediately knowable, but only accessible by the mediation of laws. But unlike physiology and psychology, these new sciences recognize that self-consciousness cannot be understood simply by identifying correlations between external conditions and behavior, but must recognize that self-consciousness is something for itself, something that *reflects* upon itself. In

⁹⁸Though Hegel was skeptical that they had any scientific worth at all, the fact that these were pseudosciences (that is, studies that fail to yield falsifiable predictions) is not the basis of their inability to observe self-consciousness. In fact, physiognomy and phrenology could be replaced in the *Phenomenology* by evolutionary biology (which may itself be a pseudoscience but seems to have at least some evidence in its favor) and magnetic resonance imaging, respectively. Even if we could discover extensive and reliable connections between an individual’s genes and his disposition, and even if we could find correlations between his thoughts and activations of certain neural clusters, such observations would still fail to come to terms with the individual’s interiority.

observing the living human body (*Leib*), reason is observing the individual simultaneously as he is affected by his environment and as he spontaneously asserts himself, for “the body is the unity of the unformed and the formed being [*des ungebildeten und gebildeten Seins*] and is the individual’s actuality permeated by his being-for-self” (H 9: 172, ¶311). As the section’s title indicates, the task of physiognomy and phrenology is the “observation of the *relation* of self-consciousness to its immediate actuality [emphasis added]”; reason here aims to discover how an individual’s being-for-self can be the same as his observable body.

Physiognomy, the search for correlations between body shape and disposition, assumes a “*necessary* antithesis of an inner and an outer” by studying what features the features of an externally observable body can tell us about the inner life of an individual (H 9: 174: ¶314). But if physiognomy is really to tell us anything about this inner life, it cannot merely relate body shape to behavior, since reason has already seen that an individual’s action is not an adequate expression of his inner life. Nor can it say anything definitive about the intentions behind actions, since these intentions are much more flexible than body-type (or genes for personality traits, for that matter). In order to avoid the deception possible in all action, physiognomy focuses on “a *presumed* [*gemeintes*] inner. It is not the murderer, the thief, who is to be recognized, but the *capacity to be one*” (H 9: 177, ¶320). Thus physiognomy can do nothing more than make general statements about individuals’ “tendencies” to externalize themselves in certain ways without actually grasping their being-for-self. For physiognomy, the body can only be an expression of interiority, whose “individuality permeates its shape, moves and speaks in it; but this existence in its entirety equally turns into a being that is indifferent to the will

[*Willen*] and the deed [*Handlung*]” (H 9: 176, ¶318). That is, by treating an individual’s being-for-self solely as a set of dispositions, physiognomy fails to live up to its goal of observing self-consciousness as a whole. Like psychology it also treats the interiority of self-consciousness as an external object, and the only difference between the two sciences is that one observes a rigid body while the other observes changing stimuli.

Although physiognomy seeks to show how a self-consciousness’s interiority is inscribed on its body, it fails to show this interiority as it simultaneously reflects on itself in its expression. Phrenology seeks to overcome this deficit by identifying laws relating the body not simply to disposition, but to thought. Reason thus posits a causal relation between thought and the body, which implies that spiritual activity is itself corporeal (H 9: 180, ¶325). In contrast to other physiological systems that serve as mere mediators between self-consciousness and the external world, the “brain and spinal cord may be considered as the immediate presence [*Gegenwart*] of self-consciousness, a presence which remains within itself, is not objective and also does not go beyond itself” (H 9: 180-1, ¶327). In the skull reason finds the dead counterpart to the living brain, a corporeal, relatively unchanging entity that is neither an organ of thought’s externalization (like the hand) nor a reflection of thought (like involuntary facial expressions), but is a mere thing that nevertheless (if we accept phrenology’s dubious methodological assumption) makes self-consciousness’s reflection on itself observable. Here questions of whether the brain affects the shape of the skull or vice versa and of how these organic processes work are beside the point. For the point of phrenology is not to reduce spiritual activity to physical processes, but to observe the spiritual and the physical in their identity. Thus while there is great reason to prefer magnetic resonance

imaging (or other brain-imaging technologies that might come along) over phrenology from the perspective of observing nature, there is no reason to prefer either one as an observation of self-consciousness. In all cases their greatest failing (their inability to explicate precisely how this observable thing is the same as an individual spirit, is also their greatest insight. In phrenology, the skull is not to be taken as a reflection of self-consciousness, but as self-consciousness itself. Whereas “look and gesture, tone of voice, even a pillar or post erected on a desert island, directly proclaim that they mean something else than what they *simply are* at first sight,” the skull is not a sign for anything, but a simple being that is identical with self-consciousness (H 9: 184, ¶333).

The ultimate problem with phrenology, though, is that “The *being* of spirit cannot in any case be taken as something simply fixed and immovable. Man is free” (H 9: 187, ¶337). To draw connections between a solid thing and infinitely flexible spirit, phrenology invents an infinite series of exceptions and qualifications to its rules (“a bump on this particular crest only indicates a murderer in certain cases,” and so on), desperately trying to keep up with spirit’s freedom. Today we can see that brain imaging technology is in no better shape, leaving researchers utterly baffled about the basic efficacy of their studies. Still, there is something like an insight in phrenology’s imaginative attempts to explain away any data that might contradict its assumptions. For in moving farther and farther away from the being it is trying to explain, phrenology instinctively recognizes “that *being as such* is not the truth of spirit at all” (H 9: 187, ¶339). It is rather reason’s own activity that here constitutes its object; the conceptual work to evade the difference between the thingliness of things and the spirituality of spirit is the only thing that comprises this difference. But as soon as reason realizes how idealized its object is, it

sees that it can find itself not merely in organisms, but in any *thing* whatsoever. Hegel is insistent that reason does not replace its initial idealism with a materialism; spirit cannot be held in the hands or crushed like bone. But it is nevertheless a *thing*, in the same sense that the idealism from which observing reason set out assumed it could not be: spirit is not entirely something living and striving, but is also the suspension of this life, which can know itself even in something so inanimate as a skull (H 9: 190, ¶343).

When observing reason reaches this final, “worst” stage, it finds its turning point and begins to reflect on itself (H 9: 189, ¶340). Now nearly every stage of the *Phenomenology* has been called its central turning point by one commentator or another, be it the master-slave dialectic for Kojève (p. 41), life and desire for Marcuse (p. 305), the unhappy consciousness for Hyppolite (pp. 190 ff.), the inverted world for Gadamer (p. 35), the suspension of representational thinking for Deleuze (p. 43), the transition to ethical substance for Taylor (pp. 171 ff.), or any of the multitude of other interpretations that apply lessons from one stage of the book to its movement as a whole. Judged in the gallery of absolute knowing, all of these interpretations have their truth, as each must be preserved in absolute knowledge of the whole. And we also should not infer too much from the fact that this is the only moment in the book where Hegel claims that spirit “must abandon itself and turn back on itself” (H 9: 188, ¶340), as this is also one of the most poorly written sections of the book, given its awkward overextension of Lichtenberg’s “box on the ear” comment (H 9: 188, ¶339) and its out-of-place reference to antisemitism (H 9: 188-9, ¶340).

Even still, we should take the centrality of this moment seriously, since it is the only point in the book before absolute knowing where spirit stops to reflect on its

previous development. Here this reflection takes the form of a remembering/internalizing (*Erinnerung*) that is soon forgotten, as reason does not yet conceive its past moments as indifferent with respect to time, but instead attempts to view them as part of a necessary sequence. Now realizing that it itself constructs its objects, reason recalls the sequence of inferences that led it from the simple thing to the organism and then to self-consciousness, knowing that it constructed each as a model of itself (H 9: 189, ¶341). Seeing each of these steps as a failed version of the unity of free subject and lifeless substance that it now knows itself to be, reason posits itself as “the transition [*Übergang*] of *immediacy* into mediation, or *negativity*” (H 9: 191, ¶344). Much as in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, reason here defines itself as a self-making being that pulls itself into existence through the negation of incomplete determinations of itself. In Kantian terms, reason takes itself as the single, overarching category, “the *infinite judgment* that the self is a thing, a judgement that suspends [*aufhebt*] itself” (H 9: 191, ¶344). Upon its first remembrance, reason takes itself to consist of nothing but the collection of determinations that it applies to itself and the power to suspend these determinations.

But if reason takes itself merely as the power of negating inadequate determinations, then it fails to appreciate the necessity of affirming what is true in these determinations, of suspending rather than negating them. Reason has not yet moved from the temporal self-conception that sees these determinations as surpassed moments to the spatial one that holds them together and offers up its own absoluteness to the possibility of free movement between the determinations. Still bound by its need for recognition, it becomes frustrated with the unresponsiveness of the thing. Though with its newfound insight into the truth of its relationship to the natural world “it knows that it is *in itself*

recognized by the thingly object”(H 9: 193, ¶347), reason needs more concrete proof that the world is not just at its disposal (as it is in the slave’s work), but recognizes and responds to its desires and plans. Hegel is careful to note that at this stage reason still sees itself as an *individual*, a uniquely modern moment of spirit lacking the inner feel for the normativity (*Sittlichkeit*)⁹⁹ of its community that was universal in Greek life. The unity of individual and community in Greek society was a common theme in Hegel’s early writings, and by placing his analysis of Greek society after the dialectic of reason in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel indicates that modern individualism must return to its Greek roots if it is ever to overcome the fragmentariness of its existence. But at this stage in its development, reason is still repulsed with what it sees as the Greeks’ sacrifice of their individuality to an arbitrary external order and so “*must* withdraw from this happy state, for . . . normativity exists merely as something *given*” (H 9: 195-6, ¶354). Unable to find recognition in what is merely given to it, reason rebuffs this gift of happy existence and sets out on its own to find a happiness it has earned.

Since the simplest way to achieve happiness is go out and take it in its immediacy, in the first stage of its search for individual self-actualization reason sees the world as beholden to its desires; “The shadows of science, laws and principles, which alone stand between self-consciousness and its own reality, vanish like a lifeless mist which cannot compare with the certainty of its own reality. It takes hold of life as a ripe fruit is

⁹⁹While Miller translates *Sittlichkeit* with “ethical life” or “ethical order,” this usage is at odds with what contemporary philosophers (particularly Derrida) have taken to calling “ethics”—which, I believe, is closer to the *Aufopferung* Hegel describes in “Absolute Knowing,” a movement that requires the suspension of both *Sittlichkeit* and morality. Thus I render *Sittlichkeit* with “normativity” to express the receptive situatedness of this relationship to community.

plucked” (H 9: 199, ¶361). Rather than consumed (as in the dialectic of life and desire), the world exists to be enjoyed. Because reason no longer conceives anything outside of itself as genuinely other, it does not desire its destruction as such, but the cancellation of the formal difference between the objective world and desiring self-consciousness (H 9: 199, ¶362). In achieving its pleasure, reason knows that its aim is not the object with which it occupies itself, but simply itself, and thus its enjoyment does not disappear in its attainment of the object, but is sustainable indefinitely.

Soon, however, reason takes this imperative as a responsibility rather than self-fulfillment and comes to see not just the world, but *itself* as beholden to its drive for pleasure. So long as the object has no content other than its role in self-consciousness’s enjoyment, its enjoyment takes on a kind of necessity, “for necessity [*Notwendigkeit*], fate [*Schicksal*], and the like is just that about which we cannot say *what* it does, what its specific laws and positive content are, . . . whose work is merely the nothingness [*Nichts*] of individuality” (H 9: 200, ¶363). When enjoyment is the individual’s sole aim, it becomes a unitary, totalitarian principle and leaves the individual wholly without content. Since this necessity is independent of the specific desires of the self-consciousness, the individual can only abandon himself to an external principle.

In a typical dialectical reversal, reason’s subsequent move is to bring the necessity into consciousness, to make the individual’s convictions primary. In positing the law of the heart as necessary, reason sets up an opposition between the peaceful resoluteness of the individual and the depravity and misery of a world that fails to live up to these convictions (H 9: 202, ¶369). There is thus a clash of necessities, one individual and authentic and the other alien and oppressive. The individual seeks to stamp out this

external necessity, and “is thus no longer the levity of the previous form [i.e., that of the “Pleasure and Necessity”] that only wants individual pleasure, but the earnestness of a high purpose which seeks its pleasure in the presentation [*Darstellung*] of the *excellence* of its own essence, and in producing the welfare of mankind” (H 9: 202-3, ¶370). But as soon as the individual attempts to carry out this law, it ceases to be a law of the heart and becomes instead a law of external circumstances. The individual’s pleasure in presenting his essence dissolves when he is forced to work within a framework in which this essence is an alien. Because the individual has drawn such a stark distinction between his pure heart and the corrupt world, he cannot see his involvement in the latter as anything but a corruption of *his* law.

Moreover, the individual soon encounters other individuals, each with his own law of the heart, and becomes especially flummoxed when it realizes that some even support what he had previously taken to be a dead, merely external order of things. Without a way to mediate these different laws of the heart or even the certainty that the law of the heart ought to prevail over the prevailing social order, the individual self-consciousness is forced either to fight to have its own law recognized (thus reverting to the fight to the death leading to the master-slave dichotomy) or to turn this conflict in on itself. In the absence of a stable sense for its own unity with the universal, madness (*Wahnsinn*) remains reason’s essential possibility (H 9: 20, ¶376). As Schelling’s *Freedom* essay will later develop at length, when reason becomes unable to separate the inner from the outer, the good that is brought into accord with self-willing from the evil that precedes and resists all unification, it is thrown into a self-lacerating despair that inverts the entire structure of reason: “The heart-throb for the welfare of humanity

therefore turns into the ravings of an insane self-conceit [*verrückten Eigendunkels*], into the fury of consciousness to preserve itself from destruction; and it does this by expelling from itself the perversion [*Verkehrtheit*] which is itself, and by striving to look on it and express it as something else” (H 9: 206, ¶377). The word Hegel uses for perversion here is the same one he uses to describe the “inverted [*verkehrte*] world” at the end of Force and the Understanding, and as before it represents a perversion of previous innocence and self-certainty. Whereas in the earlier movement spirit learned that its drive to reduce all phenomena to forces hides the dark, esoteric self-reflection inherent in all knowledge (see Gadamer 35 ff.), here it learns that its idealism (in both the ontological and political senses) hides a violence that reason can suspend but never cancel. Reason’s grounding urge of separation, its need to be a self-certain individual with the power of the negative at its disposal, can never be fully reconciled with its guiding urge for identity, for a unity of the individual and its other, and thus the “insane self-conceit” that demands a cancellation of this non-identity represents an inevitable perversion in the life and career of reason.

Reason’s immediate response to this sudden welling-up of perversion is to fight it bitterly. “Virtue” takes the stand that even though the world is dominated by selfish interests and a general disregard for the good of the whole, the individual can still step out of this evil and establish a private realm of virtue. Virtue thus actualizes itself through its rejection of the “way of the world” (*Weltlauf*), the depravity of an external order that perverts the harmony that ought to exist between the individual and his community. Unlike the activist beholden to the law of the heart, virtue does not reject external structures outright, but believes that both the individual and his environment

should conform to a higher law (H 9: 208, ¶381). The virtuous self-consciousness is thus one who works to stamp out the perverseness of individuality both in itself and in its world. Hegel again calls this moment a sacrifice (*Aufopfrung*), but unlike the absolute sacrifice, this one is to something determinate, a law. Virtue strives to eliminate everything merely individual through the development of supra-individual “gifts, capacities, and powers [Gaben, Fähigkeiten, Kräfte]” but is forced to recognize that vice, its contrary, can also make use of such powers (H 9: 210, ¶385). Indeed, the development of these powers and consequent effacement of individuality is secondary to what virtue is really trying to accomplish. In its fight with vice over the way of the world, virtue fails to recognize that its certainty of victory is based not on the strength of its own powers, but on an implicit faith that good will triumph over evil (H 9: 210, ¶386).

Virtue fails to recognize that the individualistic “way of the world” also has a claim to universality. For even when individuals strive solely for what they value, be it immediate enjoyment or enactment of their convictions, an invisible hand often guides these individual transactions such that individual pursuit of self-interest is ultimately also in the best interests of the community in general (H 9: 208-9, ¶382). Like the virtuous individual, the self-interested individual also participates indirectly in self-overcoming, because his every action within the community is simultaneously a repudiation of the perverse hatred of the community that isolates him as an individual. Indeed, this *laissez faire* approach to the way of the world better accomplishes what virtue sets out to achieve, for virtue consists in the self-effacement of the very agent (the individual) who is to carry out the universal good (H 9: 209-10, ¶384). Thus whereas the way of the world gains at least some content from the desires of individuals, virtue is a pure

abstraction that only gets its meaning through its opposition to the way of the world. If virtue is to mean anything at all, it must be predicable of individuals.

With this realization, the opposition between virtue and the way of the world vanishes. Virtue realizes that it can be nothing but the action of individuals for partially self-interested goals, and the way of the world realizes that no action can be purely self-interested, for every action is already implicitly universal. Through what Hegel will later call the “cunning [*List*] of reason” (H 20: 213, ¶209), individual actions realize broader goals and take a stand on the being of things as a whole, no matter how egocentric they appear. Reason’s next task is thus to realize that its individual actions are themselves immediately universal. Just as self-consciousness learned to embrace the perversity of the understanding’s esotericism, reason now learns to embrace the perversity of “the individuality that is real in and for itself.” Certain that its every action is simultaneously individual and universal, reason now reaches perhaps the most perverse of all its shapes, Kant’s categorical consciousness or practical reason in general. Here reason assumes that so long as the law of the heart is in accord with itself, it could not possibly be perverse. Hegel agrees that this proposition is tautologous, but denies that the hypothetical could possibly be fulfilled. Yes, a reason completely in accord with itself would be neither mad nor perverse, but (as the following dialectic shows) there is no such thing. Reason is always divided against itself, mad, perverse.

In its first stage, self-certain individuality simply assumes its own adequacy. Simply by acting in the world it takes itself to be fulfilled. In language strikingly predictive of Schelling’s *Freedom* essay, Hegel notes, “Action has, therefore, the appearance of the movement of a circle which moves freely within itself in a void, which,

unimpeded, now expands, now contracts, and is perfectly content to play in and with its own self” (H 9: 215, ¶396). Recall that in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* Hegel had criticized Schelling’s notion of divinity as “love playing with itself” (H 9: 18, ¶19), an empty and juvenile relation that retreats from the other. The central problem with this philosophical standpoint, he argues, is that “it lacks the seriousness, the pain, the patience, and the labor of the negative” (H 9: 18, ¶19). Likewise, the self-certain individual who has retreated from his madness must also be reminded of his suffering if he is to grow up and work for his individuality. Pure action “alters nothing and opposes nothing” (H 9: 216, ¶396); but as such, it externalizes nothing of the individual. If action is to be adequate to the individual, it will have to have content, will have to involve work, through which the individual can raise himself out of animal existence.

Once again we see Hegel argue for the insufficiency of mere life. The first stage of “Individuality that is real in and for itself” is cryptically titled “The spiritual animal kingdom and deceit, or the thing [*Sache*]¹⁰⁰ itself,” and it begins with a description of action valued merely as action, a stage of reason that values anything done by a self-conscious being as a worthy action, much as we take any chemical compound incorporated into an animal as organic (H 9: 216, ¶398). But such incorporation of action into consciousness is no different from the desirous incorporation of food into the organism; that is, it is pure negativity, pure destruction of otherness. Since individuality

¹⁰⁰Hyppolite suggests that *Sache* is intended to render the Greek ΒΑΔ□(∃ (p. 299). In opposition to the opaque *Ding* that spirit already knows itself in some sense to be, the *Sache* is reason’s objectivity as for-itself, its own action as immediately available and transparent. Since Hegel almost always uses *Sache* with *selbst*, I have elected to replace Miller’s confusing “matter in hand” with the simpler “thing itself.” We should note, however, that “thing itself” is for Hegel almost an antonym of “thing *in* itself [*Ding an sich*],” which points to an objectivity that can never be accessible to reason.

makes itself at home in the world not by annihilating the other but by expressing itself, “an individual cannot know what he is until he has made himself a reality through action” (H 9: 218, ¶401). Though this might seem to place the individual in a bind, since he must externalize himself through action but has no self to externalize, Hegel (following Fichte) finds this an artificial problem of reflection, not a real obstacle for reason. For there is no reason to analyze the act as anything but a temporal unity; the intention to act and the end of the action are inseparable in the posited thing-itself. To separate the action’s end from the decision and means of undertaking it misses the fact that in the decision to act the interest and means are already contained, as the intention is in the posited end (H 9: 218, ¶401). Now that it has suspended its psychological reflection, reason can view its decisions not as analyzable processes, but as self-determination in its activity.

Thus we see the second reason Hegel calls this first stage of self-certain individuality the “spiritual animal kingdom”: as if gazing upon a nature filled with creatures of varying attributes and aptitudes, individuality begins by considering the diversity of spiritual gifts as mere givens. As with physical characteristics in the animal kingdom, courage, intelligence, and all other spiritual attributes that determine how an individual acts in the world are not distributed evenly. The sociality of this realm consists in a fight for survival in which the origins of individual roles are not questioned (Shapiro 231). But if action is to be more than animal desire, more than spiritual consumption and metabolism, it must involve the development and refinement of these spiritual gifts. While reason takes every action as a true expression of individuality and thus cannot yet make judgments as to whether an action is worthy or unworthy, good or

bad, it can identify individuals as having greater or lesser capacities for action, and hence greater or lesser natures (H 9: 219, ¶402).

Already with this valuation reason realizes that action by itself is an empty expression of an individual's being-for-self and thus that what ought to be valued in action is not its pure happening, but the work it accomplishes. This, however, returns us to one of the problems of the law of the heart: if the truth of action lies in work, then it lies in an external realm in which its meaning can be coopted by other individuals. If individuals define and actualize themselves through their work, then the works of others have no value for themselves, but are merely there to be reworked; "Thus the work is, in general, something perishable [*Vergängliches*], which is obliterated by the counter-play [*Widerspiel*] of other forces and interests and really exhibits the reality of the individuality as vanishing rather than as achieved" (H 9: 221, ¶405). So long as work is taken to define the individual—in other words, so long as it is taken too seriously—it is nothing but a form of play, pretending to grasp hold of and shape the individual only to let him slip away. On the other hand, this play itself should not be taken seriously, as even the very ephemerality of work is ephemeral. Work's vanishing "is bound up with the work and vanishes with it; the negative itself perishes along with the positive whose negative it is" (H 9: 222, ¶408). The play that is entered into when work takes itself too seriously is not a suspension of work, but merely its dissolution. It is, in other words, a spiritual dead-end and not a formative stage leading it to a more sustainable relation to work.

Reason steps out of this play when it learns to place some value on the work over against itself. The perishable work is significant not because it reflects the inner being of

the individual, but because its very being *is* the being of the individual. Reason, having already learned that it is identical to a dead thing (*Ding*) such as the skull now learns that it is also identical with a product of spirit's work, "the thing [*Sache*] itself" (H 9: 223, ¶409). Work taken as the thing itself endures despite the contingencies of individual actions and intentions. In positing the work as the thing itself, reason acknowledges that even though works are achieved in contingent circumstances for contingent motives, they nevertheless deserve respect simply because they are products of self-consciousness (H 9: 223, ¶409). Just as reason's knowledge of itself as a thing revealed it to be an observable presence in the world, its self-knowledge as the thing itself reveals it to be self-identical in its action. With this confidence in its self-identity, the individual can now surrender (*aufgeben*) the various moments of action (interest, means, and end) without giving up the determinacy of its activity (H 9: 224, ¶411). In the thing itself the active individual can be confident that his actions will not dissolve into nothingness. Even when others rework his product according to their own designs, the individual knows that they can never annihilate the fact that it is *his* thing itself on which they are working (H 9: 224, ¶413).

Such unconditional self-acceptance can quickly expand to other areas that to us seem only peripherally related to the individual's activity. An individual caught up in the thing itself will assume every happenstance to be his own doing and take pride in even minor contributions to historical events (H 9: 225, ¶413). If, for example, the Napoleonic wars are being waged in a neighboring state, he might take credit for a loyalist victory given his expressed support for the loyalists at a dinner party the previous evening. When the individual tries to present his accomplishments to others, this vanity can turn

into deception. The individual will refuse to admit that he is far more concerned with his own involvement in an event than in its success, spawning a community of self-centered deceivers. For the unity of willing and achievement that the individual posits with the thing itself is merely *thought*. For anyone other than the individual doing the willing, it is no achievement at all (H 9: 225, ¶414). Thus the self-congratulation of the acting individual has its counterpart in the annoyance and disdain of others. So long as the individual values action merely as an expression of his freedom, he will fail to deserve the recognition he demands. And more generally, without a rich conception of what it means for a group of individuals to work together or *share* a thing itself, reason will remain unable to recognize individual actions without coming into conflict over their ownership (H 9: 226, ¶417).

To determine who is deserving of recognition and who is not, reason posits a distinction between morally good and morally bad actions. At first, it sees this distinction as something obvious to every individual. There simply *are* fundamental guidelines for acting that everyone can agree on (H 9: 229, ¶422). Hegel's name for the ability to recognize immediately what is right and good, "sound reason" (*die gesunde Vernunft*), recalls the "sound human understanding" from the *Differenzschrift*, which also denoted a facile immediacy of thought whose soundness or health prevented it from recognizing its own perversion. But as Hegel's title for this section already indicates, this form of reason is not immediately aware of what makes an action good or bad, but is instead a *lawgiver* (*die gesetzgebende Vernunft*). The laws that initially appear self-evident show themselves to be conditional and ambiguous. To leave no doubt that his target is Kantian morality, Hegel first considers the maxim, "Everyone ought to speak the truth." This law

first assumes that the individual involved knows the truth, for no one could condemn someone for not knowing everything or failing to disclose what was beyond his knowledge (H 9: 229-30, ¶424). Sound reason will reply that this is not a limitation of the law at all, for everyone will understand these qualifications as part of the law, but this reply itself shows the difficulty of conforming to the law, for even in saying, “Everyone ought to speak the truth,” sound reason means something other than it says (H9: 230, ¶424). What sound reason initially thought was a universally known and immediately intelligible law turns out to depend on all sorts of contingent knowledge and circumstances in guiding actions.

When sound reason tries to fall back on the still more general rule, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” it runs into similar problems. Since unintelligent love is often worse than no love at all, even this purest expression of the individual’s responsibility of universalizing himself fails the test of meaning what it says. Given the relative powerlessness of the individual compared to the state and “way of the world,” “[t]he only significance left for beneficence, which is a *sentiment (Empfindung)*, is that of an individual action to help in a case of need, which is as contingent as it is transitory” (H 9: 231, ¶425). Such a mere sentiment is no externalization of the individual at all, but the individual’s wasting away inside himself. Thus there is inevitably an alienation between the individual and his work, and he cannot count on self-certain laws to ensure his work reflects the goodness he intends it to express. For “chance determines not only the occasion of the action, but also whether it is a ‘work’ (*Werk*), whether it is not immediately dissolved and even perverted into something bad (*in Übel verkehrt*)” (H 9: 231, ¶425). The possibility of perversion is thus more essential to reason than its

actualization in work. While reason can postpone work in enjoying itself or replace it entirely with self-congratulating sponsorship of a cause, it never escapes the non-identity of the individual and the universal. It is only by coming to terms with this perversion that reason can preserve what is essential about its acting.

As a final test of its own perversion, reason scales down its own acting from self-actualization in correspondence with immediately known laws to the mere testing of laws. Reason recognizes that it cannot be the giver of laws, but is not yet willing to accept them as a gift. Rather, reason sees itself along the lines of Kant's categorical imperative as testing (*prüfen*) laws of action to determine whether they reflect the identity of individual and universal. This testing reveals that any attempt to determine this identity solely through formal calculations is bound to fail. When, for example, reason asks whether private property is justified, it finds nothing in the concept of property that might determine whether it ought or ought not be protected (H 9: 233, ¶430). Neither the protection of property nor its non-protection is formally contradictory in the sense that a square triangle is, but both inevitably run into actual contradictions in their implementation. If everyone is permitted to use whatever objects please them, then conflicts emerge over scarce resources, but on the other hand if some are closed off from these scarce resources, a contradiction arises between the individual's supposed universality and equality with others and his factual exclusive access to these resources (H 9: 233-4, ¶431). In the absence of a larger theoretical framework grown out of a community's normative substance, the individual can rely only on his own caprice in determining purportedly universal laws.

In moving from giving laws to testing them, reason has replaced the “tyrannical insolence [*Frevel*] that makes caprice [*Willkür*] into a law and ethical behavior into obedience to such caprice” with “the insolence of a knowledge that argues itself into a freedom from absolute laws, treating them as alien caprice” (H 9: 235, ¶434). In both cases reason attempts to mask its perversity and incompleteness with a self-assuring exercise of its power to choose how to act. But because it remains tied to the need to act, to express the unity of the individual and his world, it fails to see the irreducible incompleteness of this unity. Thus the lesson of reason is that it must be willing to suspend its activity and need for unity, for they themselves only magnify its perversity: “Spiritual being [*Wesen*] is actual substance through these modes [*viz.*, reason as law-giving and law-testing] being valid, not in isolation, but only as suspended [*aufgehobene*]” (H 9: 235, ¶435). Reason makes its transition into spirit upon becoming self-conscious of its need to suspend itself. By offering up (*aufopfern*) its ability to know itself through temporal action, reason admits that the only adequate response to the perversion of its individuality is to suspend its effort to unify individual and universal. Its final movement is accordingly a moment of forgetting, in which it suspends its effort to know itself temporally by reenacting the historical moments that constitute it. Yet in letting go of this temporal assessment of itself, it has not yet learned how to retrieve this self-constitution non-temporally. Because from the start it assumed its identity with all reality, reason has failed to appreciate the distance between the various moments of spirit.

Chapter 6: Reason on the Periphery

“Errancy [*Der Irrthum*] is nothing indifferent [*Gleichgültiges*], not a pure privation, but a perversion of cognition [*Verkehrtheit der Erkenntniß*] (—it belongs in the category of evil, sickness).” (S 9: 241)

These lines, delivered in Erlangen twelve or thirteen years after the appearance of Schelling’s last major published work, *Philosophical Investigations on the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters*, show Schelling still struggling to find an adequate expression for the perversion Hegel identified in the *Phenomenology* as inseparable from the movement of reason. Far from being identical with the indifferent ground of all things (as the Identity Philosophy had assumed), the errancy with which reason separates itself from its ground can have nothing to do with it. Rather than a form of organic striving (as the *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature* had postulated), reason is closer to the sickness that threatens to suspend this striving. Like a congenital disease, reason manifests itself as a permanent disruption of wholeness which carries with it the imperative of its own suspension but can never be excised without destroying itself and its host. By presenting an alternative to the spatiality of Hegel’s absolute knowing, Schelling’s *Freedom* essay enacts this suspension and seeks to explain what it means to suspend the perversity of reason.

In the essay’s Forward, Schelling boldly suggests that it is his intention to remove “reason, thinking, and knowledge” from their established place at the core of philosophical inquiry (S 7: 333). In its obsession with a particularly human knowledge, philosophy has elevated these cognitive activities above all others in establishing a division between rational spirit and mechanical nature. But now that “that root of

opposition has been torn up” and its humanistic vision proved an effete fantasy, “it is time for the higher, or rather the actual [*eigentliche*] opposition to come to the fore: the opposition of necessity and freedom, with which the innermost center of philosophy first comes into view” (S 7: 333). Reason has thus ceased for Schelling not only to be the absolute, but even to be philosophy’s central concern.¹⁰¹ By recentering philosophy around freedom’s original emergence from non-freedom, Schelling in effect announces a departure from both the *System of Transcendental Idealism*’s emphasis on human feeling and the Identity Philosophy’s elevation of reason.

Yet curiously, Schelling links the present essay to “the first general presentation of his system (in the *Journal for Speculative Physics*), whose continuation was unfortunately interrupted by external circumstances” (S 7: 333-4). The only work to appear in the *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* that Schelling labeled a “system” was the *Darstellung*, which presumed (as we saw in Chapter 4) that reason is not only the center of philosophy, but the totality of being in general. Moreover, the fact that the *Darstellung* ends as a closed and completed system renders the following claim puzzling: “It would seem that only a finished, concluded system should be able to have disciples in the true sense. Up to now the author has established nothing of the kind, but has shown only specific aspects of such a system (and this often only in a specific—e.g., a

¹⁰¹Joseph Lawrence argues that the *Freiheitsschrift* does not so much displace the centrality of reason in earlier works by Schelling and Hegel as renew and reformulate it: “Even this, the cataclysmic fall into evil and irrationality, can ultimately be absorbed into a system of reason, but only one that retrospectively discerns the significance of free *acts* instead of speculatively deducing them from the rational structure of the idea” (Lawrence 2005, 19). While Lawrence’s reading is preferable to those that label the philosophy of Schelling’s middle period a kind of irrationalism, it is contradicted both by Schelling’s direct statements that his is no longer a system of reason and the movement of the *Freiheitsschrift*, in which the appearance of the unground forestalls any possibility of a rational return to self.

polemical—context)” (S 7: 334). The *Darstellung* professes to present not just a “specific aspect” of the system, but reality as a whole, for nothing can be external to the absolute identity of reason. It calls for neither a supplement nor a recentering, but merely a filling-out of the first and second potencies.

While Schelling is clearly reading the project of the *Freiheitsschrift* back into the *Darstellung*, the connection he draws is not as forced as it first appears. For he begins the body of the essay by contrasting Leibniz’s notion of the divine understanding with Fichte’s conception of human reason. According to Schelling,¹⁰² many have been seduced by Fichte’s philosophy not because of its reawakening of the question of freedom, but by the fact that it places human reason at the beginning of philosophy (S 7: 337). It is much easier, Schelling agrees, to avoid inquiring into the nature of human freedom altogether if we can simply take a free act of the will as our starting point. But this elevation of a uniquely human reason has no systematic basis and presents human freedom only insofar as it falls into the sin that is alone possible in human beings. Sin, Schelling will later argue, is the placement of oneself where only God should be (S 7: 389-90). The essence of freedom can only be sought when we allow it to put us into question, when we do not seek our original wholeness in the origin of all being, but observe our distance from the center.

To avoid locking ourselves into sin from the very beginning and thus give ourselves a choice between good and evil, Schelling suggests we take Leibniz’s metaphysics as a starting point for our investigations. In his 1710 *Essays on Theodicy* (as in most of his major works), Leibniz draws a distinction between the human and divine

¹⁰²See Chapter 1, above, for my reading of the place of reason in Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*.

understandings. Whereas the former looks on the world from a particular perspective and thus with limited and skewed knowledge, the latter immediately knows every aspect of this and every other possible universe (Leibniz 6: 50). Because God in His infinite goodness can only will what is best, the structure of the actual universe matches that of the best of all worlds conceivable in the divine understanding. While God has complete freedom to will any of these possible worlds, his understanding outstrips his will, such that he could not will a world that contradicts the laws of his understanding (the most important of which are the laws of non-contradiction, the excluded middle, and sufficient reason). One of the major tasks of the *Theodicy* is thus to show how individual freedom is possible within such a world preselected by God. Schelling finds it completely confounding how anyone could deny the possibility of systematic knowledge of freedom *a priori*; “since individual freedom must in some way be connected with the universe (no matter if the latter is thought of realistically or idealistically), some system must be present at least in the divine understanding with which freedom coexists” (S 7: 336-7). Yet some fail to see this necessity by falling into the Fichtean trap of conceiving the individual’s reason as absolute and refusing to admit the existence of any absolute or original being. In casting his lot with Leibniz (and later Spinoza) over Fichte, Schelling shows why the *Freiheitsschrift* represents a continuation of the work of the *Darstellung*. The task of system is not at all the *System of Transcendental Idealism*’s attempt to bring individual reason and feeling to the absolute, but to show the possibility of individuality and freedom within the absolute. Schelling takes the *System* to have shown that though (individual) reason and feeling demand proof of their own freedom in their encounters with what they (provisionally) take to be their others, they are never able to find it in

experience or anything else they take to be other than themselves and must instead settle for the mere recognition (*Anerkennung*) of the other (S 7: 337-8). As the Identity Philosophy already begins to acknowledge, freedom is not to be found in the relation of the internal to the external, but in the possibility of a choice preceding all externalness.

But far from renouncing the Fichtean project of bringing reason to a recognition of its own freedom, Schelling wants to resuscitate reason so far as possible from the methodological stupor of dogmatism, even as he removes it from the center of philosophy. In placing freedom at the center of philosophy, we cannot ignore reason entirely, for “to withdraw from the dispute by swearing off reason looks more like flight than victory” (S 7: 338). In Kant’s first Critique, reason stood at the beginning of philosophy; in the *Naturphilosophie*, at its end; in the Identity Philosophy, at its center; and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* at its highest and middle point. In the *Freiheitsschrift* Schelling proposes to save reason by placing it at the periphery of philosophy. Philosophy is to provide the centripetal force that holds back the flight of a reason no longer tied to its center.

Or more precisely, system is to provide this force. If the opposition of necessity and freedom is to form the core of philosophy, philosophy’s first task is to refute the defeatism of the statement “the only possible system of reason is pantheism; but pantheism is inevitably fatalism” (S 7: 338). To refute this presupposition, we must deny either the link between reason and pantheism or the one between pantheism and fatalism. Ultimately, Schelling maintains, both routes are viable, depending on where along the periphery we place reason—that is, how we relate it to the freedom that makes it possible. If we take pantheism to be identical with Spinozism, then it is indeed a

fatalism, but there would be no reason to assume that this is the only system of reason. And indeed, a fatalism according to which all thought is determined by the mechanical laws of God's nature contradicts reason's own assumption that it can spontaneously posit and negate claims about the universe. If, on the other hand, reason is seen as beholden to the necessity of God's unfolding, then the first half of the statement is correct. "For it certainly could not be denied that if pantheism denotes nothing but the doctrine of the immanence of all things in God, every rational view [*Vernunftansicht*] would have to be attracted to this doctrine in some sense" (S 7: 339). If we fix reason to the idea of God, the only possible system of reason is indeed pantheism. But such a system, far from necessarily denying the freedom of the individual, seems to arise from the very conviction of individual freedom. Many turn to pantheism precisely because they do not feel themselves limited by an infinitely powerful and wholly other God, but participate in his divinity. Since the very idea of an infinite God precludes the possibility of a reality outside him, it is absurd to imagine God withdrawing or suspending his power over independent human actions. Pantheism would therefore seem to be the only possible system of freedom, lest independence of God divorce the human being from God's freedom (S 7: 339).

But if a system can make a place for reason only if it finds a way to combine pantheism and freedom, then the precise meaning of this pantheism must be further determined. There are three ways, Schelling states, to take the claim that God is everything (S 7: 339-40; Baumgartner 1995 46). First, we could say that things are immanent in God. Though insufficiently developed, this is an uncontroversial position, since God is generally defined as the being who admits of nothing outside of himself.

Second, we could say that each individual thing is identical with God, that each is a God. And finally, we could interpret pantheism to claim that individual things are nothing. While Spinoza is usually taken to hold the first or second view (depending on whether one emphasizes the infinitude of God's attributes or finitude of his modes), his system is compatible only with the third. Far from asserting the divinity of individual modes of God, he gives us no way to conceive the connection of the finite and the infinite. For as we saw in Chapter 1, Spinoza's *natura naturata* is that which is known only through another being. "Whatever their relationship to God beyond this may be," the modes of Spinoza's God "are absolutely separated from him because they can be only in and according to another (i.e., God) and because their concept is derivative and would not be at all possible without the concept of God" (S 7: 340). Since they are known only through another, the sum of these modes could not possibly be identical with God, "for whatever is derived according to its nature cannot, through any kind of summation, pass over to what is by nature original, just as little as the individual points of a periphery [*Peripherie*] taken together can constitute it, since the periphery as a whole is necessarily prior to the points in terms of the concept" (S 7: 340-1). Revealingly, with this metaphor Schelling places God at the periphery alongside reason and the concept. Both reason and God (unlike the mental faculties posited by the understanding and the finite modes of God) are indissoluble into atomic components and thus resist the lifeless force of Spinozism, and yet the being of each is determined by another center (freedom).¹⁰³ Spinoza can help us analyze this periphery but offers no resources for presenting it *as* the periphery or measuring its distance from the center.

¹⁰³In *Philosophy and Religion*, Schelling displaces Spinoza's God by calling *freedom* that which can only be explained and determined through itself (S 6: 52).

Schelling's original criticism of the understanding thus remains in effect even as it ceases to have the same centrality that it once did. Yet although Schelling has returned to the same hierarchy common to the other major works of German idealism, his preservation of reason's prerogative over the understanding rests on a radically different ontological assumption. In all the other works we have examined, reason's priority was based primarily on a developmental model, even as this model and the priority of the organic it assumed was suspended. In the *Ideas*, for instance, reason and the understanding were conceived as parallel forms of striving, reason striving for unity from out of an original separation and the understanding for continuity across a totalized field. Reason was given priority because it was more organic and less in danger of being seen as a "dead faculty." Whereas the understanding (according to the *Ideas*) strives merely to bring polemical forces in continuity with each other, reason strives to expand itself by adapting its self-conception to incorporate those external things from which it has been separated. Later, in *On the World-soul*, the *First Projection*, and the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling allows reason's striving to incorporate even the striving of the understanding, such that reason is, if not its predator, at least a greater and more fully self-subsistent organism than the understanding. In the *Differenzschrift* and the Identity Philosophy, this hierarchy is presented instead as a devolution or depotentiation (*Depotenzierung*) of the understanding from reason. Mere understanding is a privative form of cognition in that it allows reason's need to return to itself to dissipate. And in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, reason is given priority because of its more complete self-knowledge, its ability not just to understand and shape the world, but to know itself in understanding and shaping the world.

Now that reason is neither the understanding's destination nor the source of its emanation but already itself on the periphery, Schelling must replace these developmental models with another that can present reason's superiority to the understanding without relying on a narrative of evolution or devolution. To this end Schelling argues that Spinoza fails to account for freedom not because of his pantheism, but because of his mechanism (S 7: 346-7). If pantheism is the only possible system of reason (an assumption to which Schelling is not yet willing to concede, since he wants to explore the essence of freedom before fixing on a definition of reason), then Spinoza's efforts to build his philosophy using concepts of the understanding prevent him from presenting the system in its full rationality. Or as Schelling bluntly puts it, "The error of his system lies by no means in the positing of things *in God*, but rather in that there are *things* in the abstract concept of the world's beings [*der Weltwesen*], instead of infinite substance itself, which in fact is also a thing for him" (S 7: 349). A true pantheism would not only be able to connect individuals to their ground (or the periphery to its center), but would also express the freedom of these individuals (by refusing to break them apart into mechanically related things).

To make sense of this true form of pantheism, we need a reworked conception of identity, such as the one the Identity Philosophy tried to develop. Whereas Schelling observes that his contemporaries would often take statements like "This body is blue" or "God is evil" to indicate a simple uniformity (*Einerleiheit*) of subject and predicate, such that "this body" is taken to mean nothing other than "blue" and "God" to mean nothing other than "evil," "ancient, profound logic differentiated between subject and predicate according to what preceded and what followed (*antecedens et consequens*), and thereby

expressed the real sense of the law of identity” (S 7: 342). By distinguishing between ground and consequence or existence, we can understand the copula in the above statements to mean not a simple uniformity, but rather a relation of ground. This existing body is also something blue, though not in the same sense that it is a body. And God is not evil by being God, but rather by being everything, he shares a common ground with evil. When God’s identity with the world is conceived adequately, the unity of all things in God shows itself to be creative [*schöpferische*] rather than uniform and totalitarian (S 7: 345). By conceiving the immanence of all things in God as a relation of existence to its ground, Schelling hopes to avoid both the determinism of Spinozism and the crude ontology of identity that underlies it.

In locating the ground of all things in God, Schelling is careful to observe that “dependence does not annul [*hebt . . . auf*] autonomy [*Selbständigkeit*] or even freedom. It does not determine essence [*Wesen*], but merely says that the dependent, whatever it might be, can only be as a consequent of that upon which it is dependent” (S 7: 346). If we take the statement that God is identical with all reality in its true sense, that God is the ground of reality, then we do not thereby necessarily assume that individuals are unfree in their relation to God. True, they are not free to be their own grounds, but they can nevertheless determine their own essences. Schelling cites Leibniz in noting that it is no more contradictory to state that the infinitely powerful God has a ground than it is to say that the son of a man is also a man, as God’s very existence implies a ground from which it has arisen (S 7: 346). Indeed, it is impossible to conceive of an autonomous being without an external ground. For autonomy would be meaningless if it were not first predicated on a dependence that could subsequently be suspended. Moreover, “the same

holds true for the comprehension of one thing in another. The individual member, such as the eye, is possible only in the whole of an organism; nevertheless it has a life for itself, indeed a kind of freedom, the obvious proof of which is disease, which lies in the eye's capability" (S 7: 346). Being in another or even dependent on another does not rule out the possibility of free action, or even action contrary to the individual's ground of existence. The presence of evil and disease in the world are testaments to the essential freedom of individual moments, for they indicate a real possibility of the ground's perversion.

Spinoza's attempt to analyze God's modes as mere things following mechanical laws is thus incoherent, as it denies the independence of those things it supposes to be (somehow) independent of God. While he asserts the infinity of both thought and extension, he fails to appreciate how either of these can return to itself and thus be infinite in any meaningful way. Yet, Schelling notes, as the eye is to the organism or man is to God, "thoughts are certainly engendered by the soul; but the engendered thought is an independent power, continuing to act by itself, indeed growing to such an extent in the human soul that it vanquishes its own mother and subjugates [*unterwirft*] her" (S 7: 347). Like a disease, thought attests to its own freedom by outstripping attempts to hem it in, by subjugating the very ground of its possibility. A merely analytic understanding will forever fail to see the freedom expressed in such subjugation and thus miss the freedom that pantheism aims to express: "Immanence in God so little contradicts freedom, that only the free, and only insofar as it is free, is in God, and the unfree, insofar as it is unfree, is necessarily outside God" (S 7: 347).

A system of reason can only be raised to this cognition of freedom once it has passed through the essential insights of (Schelling's) German idealism. Spinoza's mechanical model of nature must be replaced with a dynamic one, which allows us to raise ourselves to the cognition of freedom. Once theoretical reason has come to know itself as both organic and practical, it realizes that "In the final and highest instance there is no other being [*Seyn*] than will. Will is original being [*Ursein*], and to it alone all predicates apply: groundlessness, eternity, independence of time, self-affirmation. All philosophy strives only to find this highest expression" (S 7: 350). Such an enlarged idealism not only grants the Fichtean maxim that "Activity, life, and freedom alone are the true reality," but also seeks to show the converse, that everything real, all of nature is permeated by will and therefore freedom (S 7: 351). It would seem, then, that philosophy must go through reason—or more specifically, through a specific conception of reason resembling that in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*—in order to think the essence of being as will. But such a will, which forms the real basis of philosophy, is ontologically prior to any employment of reason. Will thus usurps reason's place in the Identity Philosophy as self-affirmation and pushes it back to the periphery. German idealism has undoubtedly reached the thought of the will's centrality through its attempts to unite theoretical and practical reason, but the place of reason remains in question.

Indeed, Schelling begins to undermine the claim that it was a sensitivity to the dialectic of reason (which, in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, is redundant, assuming dialectic is what the synthetic method seeks to uncover) that led German philosophy to its present heights. Philosophy is governed not by the necessity of its object, but by a sense for the inexhaustible freedom of thought; "Only he who has tasted

of freedom can sense the yearning [*Verlangen*] to make everything its analogue, to spread it throughout the whole universe. Whoever does not come to philosophy by this path merely follows and imitates what others do, without feeling why they do it" (S 7: 351). To this point, while idealism has been guided by this implicit feel for freedom, it has not yet been able to express it, mired as it has been in its obsession with analyzing the elements of cognition. Even Kant's thing-in-itself, absolved of all temporality and raised to identity with freedom, is still determined by our lack of access to it rather than through its own inner freedom (S 7: 352). So long as freedom is defined merely formally and according to our cognition of it, it will fail to respond to the essence of human freedom: the real openness to both good and evil (S 7: 352).

Whereas Schelling dispenses rather easily with Friedrich Schlegel's claim that pantheism implies determinism, he admits that it is much more difficult to reconcile an individual's actual capacity for good and evil with the omnipotence and beneficence of God. Prior to Schelling, there had been three approaches to this problem. One could, like Spinoza and the stoics, deny that evil is a real predicate. Nothing is evil in itself, this view holds; things are evil merely with respect to particular finite purposes. But by denying that an individual could choose evil, this view reduces the will to mere inclination. At the bottom of every action, this view presupposes, is a decision based not upon a pure act of will, but on some sort of calculation weighing risks and benefits.

If, on the other hand, there is such a thing as evil, then it must be either something real in itself or a mere privation of good. Those taking evil to be something real in itself have generally subscribed to a Manichean dualism, according to which individuals are simultaneously compelled by both good and evil forces irreducible to each other. "But

this system,” Schelling argues, “if it actually is thought to be the doctrine of two absolutely different and mutually independent principles, is only a system of the self-laceration and despair of reason” (S 7: 354). Not only does it fail to show how the universe could be composed of two fundamentally different principles, but it fails to show how they could be united in a single practical reason able to choose between them.

But if with Leibniz we take the Augustinian route and view evil as merely a privation of God’s goodness, such that evil appears only where God lacks the power to engender his infinite beneficence, then we must still explain how such privation is possible within an infinite being. Leibniz’s answer, as we already saw, was that the laws of God’s understanding circumscribe the possible worlds he can realize. While he is incapable of generating pure goodness in the world (since then he would merely be creating another God, which would mean there would be two beings with exactly the same attributes, thus violating what has come to be called Leibniz’s law), God spreads his goodness throughout the universe so far as possible (Leibniz 6: 382). But then evil is still a non-being with no ground independent of God. Without a positive account of evil, the Augustinian-Leibnizian privation theory risks falling into the Spinozistic denial of evil. And even more importantly, this view does not allow for the possibility of a real choice between good and evil. If evil is merely a byproduct of God’s good will, then it is not something that can be chosen and thus fails to account for real freedom.¹⁰⁴ Various parallel doctrines, such as the one that holds evil to express a degree of emanation from God or a mysterious “superfluity of being [*Ueberfluß des Wesens*]” that escapes his

¹⁰⁴See Leibniz 6: 122, where Leibniz argues that no one would voluntarily choose evil, and Leibniz 4: 455 where he argues that even Judas’s betrayal accorded with God’s wishes.

beneficent guiding hand merely push back the problem, as they still need to explain how something that was originally in accord with God's will could come to differ from it (S 7: 355).

Schelling's new insight, the basis for his renewed ontology of identity, is his effort to work out "the distinction . . . between a being [*dem Wesen*] insofar as it exists and a being insofar as it is merely the ground of existence" (S 7: 357). More specifically, he argues that evil, defined as departure from God's will, can only be thought systematically if we allow that God's ground is distinct from his existing. Though evil is indeed something real and thus must be accounted for in any complete system, it arises prior to God's will, in the being (*Wesen*) that grounds his existence. Being or essence (*Wesen*) thus has two sides: its appearance as existence and its longing to appear as ground (Cf. Jantzen 77ff.).

In a letter to Schelling (written in 1810 and published with Schelling's 1812 reply in the first edition of the *Allgemeine Zeitschrift von Deutschen für Deutsche*), Karl Eschenmeyer charges that the distinction between ground and existence is meaningless in God: "Since God has the ground of his existence in himself, this ground immediately ceases to be a ground and collapses into one with his existence" (S 8: 145). While such a distinction is possible in nature, "for God the distinction is invalid precisely because you [Schelling] assume that ground and consequence, form and essence [*Wesen*], being [*Seyn*] and becoming collapse into one and the same point" (S 8: 145-6). Schelling is willing to concede the identity of Ground and his being, but he counters that Eschenmeyer has misread the *Freedom* essay's most important distinction. While God's existence (*Existenz*) and the ground of this existence (*Grund zur Existenz*) do coincide,

God as *existing* (*existierend*) is something different entirely from his ground (S 8: 164). In order to conceive God as *existing*, we must take him as subject. God is not simply a (self-) posited existence, but exists insofar as he freely wills creation. Thus a full grasp of the difference between essence as ground and essence as existing requires a prior understanding of both human and divine subjectivity, each of which the *Freiheitschrift* aims to conceive anew.

Still, in the *Freiheitschrift* Schelling does equip his readers with some resources for conceiving the distinction between ground and existing.¹⁰⁵ God's existence is not simply *caused* by its ground, but actively distinguishes itself from this ground, i.e., from nature, in a way similar to how light in the nature philosophy distinguishes itself from gravity:

Gravity precedes light as its eternally dark ground; it is not *actu* itself, and flees into the night when light (that which exists [*das Existierende*]) dawns. Even light does not fully break the seal beneath which gravity lies enclosed. Therefore gravity is neither pure essence [*Wesen*] nor the actual being [*Seyn*] of absolute identity, but is only a consequence of the nature of absolute identity; or it is absolute identity viewed in a specific potential. (S 7: 358).

Essence as existing is thus unable to “break the seal” of its ground, which must lie, at least to some extent, in permanent darkness. Just as dawning is only possible in a night that remains closed off to it, even divine existence cannot fully incorporate its ground into itself. Since Schelling calls this ground of God *nature*, we may say that “nature in general is everything that lies beyond the absolute being [*Seyn*] of absolute identity” (S 7: 358). Though this beyond is equally a before, since it indicates not only the ground's

¹⁰⁵While he claims that these resources were already available in the *Darstellung*'s account of light's emergence from gravity (S 7: 358n), he is probably being too generous to himself, given that the Identity Philosophy makes no room for subjectivity as anything but the opposite of objectivity.

incomprehensibility but also its precedence, the latter “is to be thought neither as precedence in time, nor as priority of being [*Seyn*]. . . . God has within himself an inner ground of his existence which to this extent precedes him in his existence; yet God is just as much prior to the ground insofar as the ground, also as such, could not be if God did not exist *actu*” (S 7: 358). With this reciprocity, Schelling wants to abandon the doctrine of immanence that takes pantheism “to express a dead comprehension of things in God” (S 7: 358). Instead, this new doctrine takes the finite things of nature to come into being independently of God. But this does not imply that nature is therefore outside of God, for such a conception would once again bring God and nature into an economy of immanence. And indeed, it is hard to conceive pantheism in any other way than placing the ground of finite things in the ground of God. For to speak of finite things at all implies some separation from God, and yet pantheism (which Schelling takes to be the only possible system of reason) disallows the possibility of anything truly outside of God. Thus the only alternative is to place the becoming of things in that which is God and yet simultaneously exceeds his conscious will (S 7: 359).

In an explicit effort to anthropomorphize¹⁰⁶ this ground, Schelling describes it as “the longing [*Sehnsucht*]¹⁰⁷ the eternal one feels to give birth to himself” (S 7: 359). Since it is not yet the unity that God gives to the universe, but a mere longing for or addiction to being, “it is also (viewed for itself) will, but will in which there is no understanding, and which therefore is not autonomous and perfect will, since understanding is the true will in willing. Nevertheless it is a willing of the understanding,

¹⁰⁶For a discussion of anthropomorphism in the *Freiheitsschrift*, see Heidegger 42:124-5.

¹⁰⁷It should be noted that the etymology of the German word *Sucht*, “addiction,” is distinct from the false cognate *Suchen*, to seek, and derives instead from a root denoting illness—hence its English cognate “sick.”

namely its longing and desire; it is not a conscious but a presentient [*ahndender*] will, whose presentiment [*Ahndung*] is the understanding” (S 7: 359). Whereas for Leibniz the divine will is complete and autonomous, grounded as it was in a perfect understanding of all possible worlds, for Schelling the proto-will expressed in nature’s longing precedes the intelligence that God brings to bear on the world and thus carries a merely partial understanding. Rather than the full consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) of Leibniz’s God, this longing has only a vague presentiment (*Ahndung*) of what is to come to be in its actualization.

Thus the challenge for a philosophy that seeks to think not only the order of divine goodness but the ground from which it arises is to “speak of the essence of this longing viewed in and for itself, of what must indeed be seen although it has long since been supplanted by the Higher One which has risen from it, and even though we cannot apprehend it with the senses, but only with the spirit and the thoughts” (S 7: 359).

However this apprehension is to occur, it is clear that it must consist of something other than the understanding and will always be at risk of an eruption of meaninglessness, for

Following the eternal act of self-revelation, all is rule, order, and form in the world as we now see it. But the ruleless still lies in the ground as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as though order and form were original, but rather as if something initially ruleless had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible basis [*Basis*] of reality in things, the irreducible remainder [*der nie aufgehende Rest*], that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in the understanding, but rather remains eternally in the ground. (S 7: 359)

It has been far too little recognized in Schelling research that Schelling uses the term “irreducible remainder” only with regard to the understanding. In this particular respect, the *Freiheitsschrift* says nothing that Schelling had not already said as early as 1795 (*Of the I*, S 1: 157-8). So long as it takes its own ground as something extant, as something

to be analyzed as one of many worldly beings, the understanding will lose itself in infinite striving and never return to a knowledge of itself. This was no new insight in philosophy even when Kant argued that reason must serve as a corrective for the groundless wandering of the understanding. Despite the elegance of Schelling's formulation of this passage, it betrays nothing of the central insight of the *Freedom* essay, that reason itself is abyssal.

This is why another one of Eschenmeyer's less-discussed criticisms (from the same letter in which he criticizes Schelling's division of ground and existence in God) simultaneously goes to the core of the problem of the *Freiheitsschrift* and completely misses its point. Given that Schelling purports to base his system on an analysis of God into ground and existence, Eschenmeyer reasonably asks if this does not reduce God himself to an object of the understanding (*Verstandeswesen*) (S 8: 146). To this end, Eschenmeyer recalls Schelling's distinction in the *Darstellung* between the analytic understanding on the one hand and reason on the other, "which does not have the idea of God, but is this idea itself and nothing else besides" (S 8: 146). In order to think God's separation into ground and existence, he argues, we would have to abandon reason's most basic knowledge of God's unity, releasing the understanding from the only moorings that could possibly ground it.

Schelling agrees fully, but counters that these moorings are themselves unthinkable. In elevating reason over the understanding, the prior works of German idealism—including, I have argued, Schelling's systematic efforts from *Of the I* to the Identity Philosophy—hold that the understanding can have no access to the will's (including God's will's) tendency to return to itself, which the understanding can view

only as part of an abyss of ungrounded desires. Whereas reason—be it Kant’s essentially problematic criticism, Fichte’s self-grounding striving, the *Naturphilosophie*’s self-completing development, or the *Phenomenology*’s perverted self-certainty—finds its truth in willing, the understanding obsessively dissects all desires in the vain hope of finding some truth beneath them. Thus it can only be regarded as a deep betrayal of Schelling’s idealistic roots when he responds to Eschenmeyer’s criticisms by asking, “Can a being [*Wesen*] acting in accord with a purpose and intention even be thought that is not *eo ipso* also an object of the understanding [*Verstandeswesen*]?” (S 8: 166). Here Schelling is questioning not only the absolute priority of reason over the understanding, but also the privileging of the intelligibility given by reason. The early Schelling and Hegel both argued that it was reason, and not the understanding, that was key to conceiving both the teleological and self-organizing structure of organic nature and the freedom of thought. Accordingly, they thought self-sufficient beings were inaccessible to the understanding, which ceaselessly analyzed any object it encountered, ignoring the wholeness that living beings (*Lebewesen*) can give themselves. For Schelling to grant the understanding a place in cognizing willing and to think of it as itself a self-subsistent form of striving is to deny reason the right to distinguish itself absolutely from the understanding. By locating reason in relation to its ground rather than to its self-genesis, Schelling places by reason and the understanding along the periphery of philosophy.

The distinction between reason and the understanding is thus not to be conceived solely by reason, but instead by the freedom that makes both possible. What Eschenmeyer proposes in place of such a living understanding Schelling calls “cold reason, immediately the dead concept of truth” (S 8: 178). “I find,” Schelling intones (in

apparent disregard of his entire Identity Philosophy), “this type of idealism the most convenient [*bequemste*] of all. It throws out all questions of origin, of becoming, which are always the most difficult” (S 8: 178). If philosophy is to provide any clue regarding the freedom of human subjectivity, it must not dissolve the universe into such a simple identity. For under such a totalized reason, the individual human being could only be a reflection (*Reflex*) of the idea and would have no ability to depart from divine providence through sin (S 8: 178).

But rather than working out the precise place of the understanding in a new philosophy with reason at the periphery, Schelling offers a mere glimpse. The original longing at the ground of God “directs itself towards the understanding, which it does not yet know, as we in our longing yearn for [*in der Sehnsucht . . . verlangen*] an unknown, nameless good, and it moves presentiently like an undulating, surging sea, similar to Plato’s matter, following a dark, uncertain law, incapable of forming something lasting by itself” (S 7: 360). The possibility of something lasting, of a constant presence, only arrives on the scene when God, roused to existence, beholds himself in an image. This image, which Schelling also calls a representation (*Vorstellung*), is the *word* of God’s longing, “in the sense that we say the word of [i.e., the solution to] a riddle” (S 7: 361n). In this word or answer, we find the wholeness of reason’s ability to return to itself through self-reflection. Through this wholeness, the divine understanding is finally born and begins to impose its will on previously ruleless nature: “The first effect of the understanding in nature is the division of forces, since only thereby is the understanding able to unfold the unity which is contained unconsciously but necessarily in nature as in a seed” (S 7: 361). Organic life comes into being when the pure light of the understanding

reaches into its dark ground and violently disrupts its undulating repose, giving it the powers of self-formation, disease, and death. Such quickening is possible because “this essence (initial nature) is nothing other than the eternal ground of God’s existence, and therefore it must contain within itself, although locked up, the essence of God as a gleaming spark of life in the darkness of the deep” (S 7: 361). In the same way that sickness is only possible in health and health only apprehensible in relation to sickness, it is only with the light of divine revelation that the dark ground’s potential begins to appear and only over against this ground that light is intelligible.¹⁰⁸

Yet there are limits to this illumination and intelligibility. For “longing, aroused by the understanding, strives henceforth to contain the spark of life apprehended within itself, and to lock itself within itself in order that a ground always remain” (S 7: 361). Thus while Schelling would here probably be willing to concede Hegel’s claim in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that the understanding is the “most astonishing and mightiest of powers”, he could in no way accept the inflated claim that it is also “the absolute power” (H 9: 27, ¶32). For evil (and therefore freedom) is conceivable within a system only so long as the divine understanding is not absolute, only so long as it fails to spread the light of divine goodness throughout the universe. The understanding thus plays a vital, yet nevertheless secondary and only partially defined role in the *Freiheitsschrift*. While it helps to mark the distance between divine goodness and the

¹⁰⁸In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling makes the same point by calling both evil and disease “nonbeings” (*Nichtseyendes*): “A nonbeing frequently impresses on us as a being, when seen from another perspective. What, for example, is disease? A state that is *counter to nature*, consequently a state that could not *be* and nevertheless is, a state that has no real ground and yet possesses undeniably a fearsome [*furchtbare*] reality. Evil is for the moral world what disease is for the physical world; viewed in one way, it is the most definitive nonbeing while possessing a terrible [*schreckliche*] reality in another way” (S 7: 436-7).

ground that makes this goodness as well as evil possible, it yields no firm determinations that would allow human freedom to be *understood*.

Still, Schelling may be forgiven for this vagueness, since, as in the Identity Philosophy, his aim is not to analyze the structures that stand at the periphery of philosophy, but to present the freedom at its center. Rather than piecing together how the divine understanding gives shape to its ground, he wants to show how God and the human being enact their freedom as *existing subjects*. The crucial difference, he notes, is that what is in God an indivisible unity of spirit and ground is separable in the human being.¹⁰⁹ Humans' capacity for evil stems from their ability to suspend the universal love of spirit and allow the ground's dark drive of selfhood to predominate (S 7: 364).¹¹⁰ By placing reason to the side, Schelling is able to explore how the freedom of subjectivity is grounded not in its self-positing, but in its divisibility. Because it can separate the light and dark principles in itself, spirit can will either to unify its particular will with the universal will and hence to remain at the center of God's love or to separate its particularity from the universal and hence exile itself to the periphery (S 7: 364-5).

This should not be taken as a demonic inversion of the Kantian doctrine that only action in accord with the moral law is free (K 4: 447). Schelling is not claiming that human beings demonstrate their freedom only when they choose to elevate their particular wills. Rather, even the affirmation of the universal will—that is, of the

¹⁰⁹As Paul Tillich puts it, "Freedom is the power to become disunited from oneself" (Tillich 48).

¹¹⁰In his 1811 Stuttgart Lectures Schelling elaborates on the uniqueness of human freedom: "Thus by virtue of occupying the middle ground between the nonbeing of nature and the absolute being [*absolut-Seyenden*] = God, man is *free* from both. He is free from God by virtue of possessing an independent root in nature and free from nature by virtue of the fact that the divine has been aroused within him; that is, he is in the midst of, and simultaneously above, nature" (S 7: 458).

divine—shows the individual’s freedom and potential for evil, as it has the audacity to place into the center what is merely particular, what arises from the dark ground and resists the light (S 7: 365). Spirit is a form of existence above both the dark ground and the understanding and gains its freedom from its ability to distinguish between them rather than from its ability to deviate from divine providence. When, however, the human spirit uses this ability to raise its self-will to the highest principle or takes it as the basis of all universal will—for example, when Spinoza makes pursuit of individual power the basis for all charity—then its every action becomes infected with evil. Just as disease can make even the most ordinary of organic processes malignant, so does an evil will use the understanding’s power of transformation to pervert its amoral dark ground into “a false life, a life of lies, a growth of unrest and corruption [*Verderbniß*]” (S 7: 366). In contrast both to those who place too much distance between good and evil (by making them distinct principles fighting over the soul) and those who place too little distance (by denying evil as in itself different from the good), this “solely correct concept of evil, according to which evil is rooted in a positive perversion [*Verkehrtheit*] or reversal [*Umkehrung*] of principles” shows how evil is neither something real in itself independently of the good nor a mere privation of the good (S 7: 366). Instead, evil is a corruption of the spiritual power to raise itself above both nature’s amorality and God’s goodness. And so, “Just as disease certainly is nothing essential, and is truly only a phantasm [*Scheinbild*] of life, a mere meteoric appearance [*Erscheinung*] of it—a hovering [*Schwanken*] between being and non-being—even though it announces itself to one’s feelings as something very real, so it is with evil” (S 7: 366).¹¹¹

¹¹¹On the other hand, Schelling notes, this parallel of evil and sickness also shows how

To show the novelty of this position, Schelling again contrasts it to the Leibnizian conception of evil. According to Leibniz, evil can be felt as something positive despite being a mere privation in much the same way that freezing water can burst even the most solid of pipes despite the fact that it results from an absolute decrease of motion (S 7: 369). Or better, individual souls can, according to this Leibnizian view, be likened to inert bodies. When the same force is applied to two bodies of different masses, the more inert (i.e., more massive) one will reach a slower speed. Yet this slower speed, Leibniz would maintain, is not something positive in itself, but merely a greater privation of motion (S 7: 370). Schelling counters that such an analogy cannot explain what is truly positive in evil and “in fact arises from a lifeless concept of the positive, according to which privation alone can oppose it” (S 7: 370). If we are to have any hope of avoiding the contradictions and trivialities of privation theories of evil, we need to frame both evil’s negativity and its positivity in terms of an organic whole. Positivity must be viewed as wholeness or unity and negativity as the division that always threatens it. Evil and good do not differ materially, since they each are derived from the same whole, but rather in their form, in that evil consists in the separation of what in the good is unified.

Thus we see how the pure formality of the identity philosophy was necessary to overcoming the difficulties of Schelling’s earlier philosophy of nature. In order to conceive the possibility of freedom, the organic had to be decoupled from reason and shown to be the ground of the possibility of perversity. The irreducible remainder at the

evil is to be overcome: “Thus, on the one hand, all original healing consists in the reestablishment of the relationship of periphery to center, and the transition from sickness to health can truly occur only through its opposite, i.e., through the reassumption of separate and particular life into the inner spark of being, from which the division [*Scheidung*] (crisis) again results” (S 7: 366).

ground of understanding exercises its own sort of force that never manages to return to itself. In the language of the *Freedom* essay, this means that the essence of personality had to be discovered so that evil could be seen as more than a mere opposition or separation of forces (S 7: 370). The individual freedom underlying reason rests neither on its substantial conditions (which Kant, Fichte, and Hegel all also denied) nor on the mere fact that its unity could be perverted, but rather on a prerational tendency to perversion and corruption (S 7: 370-1). Though reason will always strive to recover this ground, the fact that it can only exist in a personality, in an existence emerging from its ground, forever leaves open the possibility of corruption.

But even here Schelling admits that he has not yet distinguished between ground and existence sharply enough. While he has shown the ground of human evil in the ground of God, he has not yet sufficiently described the divine and human existences through which evil becomes actual. To complete his account of the origins of freedom, Schelling will need to show both its causes in the human personality and its possibility in the divine personality (S 7: 373). He begins with the latter task, examining not only “how evil becomes actual in the individual human being alone, but also its universal effectiveness, or how it was able to burst forth from creation as an unmistakable general principle, battling everywhere against the good” (S 7: 373). Schelling has already noted that the uniqueness of human freedom consists in the spirit’s ability to separate the nature and understanding that are inseparable in God’s revelation (S 7: 364). But since everything that *is* is in God, the structure of God’s revelation must somehow allow for this division in humanity. The solution depends first on grasping God’s light and dark principles not merely as forces, but as wills: “The will of love and the will of the ground

are two different wills, each of which is for itself; but the will of love cannot oppose, nor can it suspend [*aufheben*] the will of the ground, since it would then have to strive [*widerstreben*] against itself” (S 7: 375). The will of love must be more than a mere counterforce to the ground, for it would otherwise be a reactionary and self-hating will. But nature or the will of ground also cannot be merely reactionary to the will of love, for its very effectiveness depends on love (S 7: 375). The two can only be independent and reciprocal drives if “the will of love and the will of the ground become one precisely by being divided and by each acting for itself from the very beginning. Thus the will of the ground arouses the self-will of the creature right in the first creation, so that when spirit then arises as the will of love, it may find something resistant [*Widerstrebendes*] in which it can realize itself” (S 7: 375-6). Conceived in terms of God’s existence, the ground of evil and hence of freedom is present at the very beginning of creation. In order for the divisive power of spirit to appear in an intelligible system of pantheism, it must be linked to the essential duality of the respective wills of God’s ground and understanding.

Schelling thus overcomes the inability of “all modern European philosophy since it began with Descartes” to think nature’s living ground (S 7: 356) by separating nature from the divine understanding aroused in it:

The sight of all nature convinces us that this arousal has occurred through which all life first achieved the final degree of sharpness and definition. The irrational and accidental, which appears combined with the necessary in the formation of beings, particularly of organic beings, proves that it is not merely a geometrical necessity that was at work here, but that freedom, spirit, and self-will were also in play [*mit im Spiel waren*]. Indeed, wherever there is appetite [*Lust*] and desire [*Begierde*], there is already a kind of freedom inherent, and no one will believe that the desire constituting the ground of this particular natural life, and the drive [*Trieb*] to survive not just generally but in this determined existence, were attributes given to the creature already created—but rather that they themselves did the creating. (S 7: 376)

Schelling's language seems to hint at the same type of abyssal continuity that the Nature Philosophy associated with the understanding. In its effort to link its own drives to those of its ground, the Nature Philosophy held, the understanding posits the ubiquity of forces in nature. While this allows the understanding to see itself as continuous with nature, it also implies that nature, and with it the understanding's own origins, can be analyzed indefinitely, a spurious infinite that only reason can bring back to itself. Through the mediation of the understanding, reason is able to find primitive images of itself in nature, observing freedom even in nature's unconscious and instinctive drives. But if the forces of nature are traced back not to their positing in the understanding, but to a longing that emerges prior to all understanding, then nature is not only irreducible to a single force, but is at bottom inaccessible even to reason. Accordingly, force must be reconceived independently of the understanding's drive for continuity as a sort of play prior to, and yet discontinuous with the power of understanding. What Schelling saw earlier as nature's enigmatic withdrawal is here taken to be a kind of irrational freedom. Because the (proto-)will of nature cannot be brought into even a perverted unity of reason's willing, reason cannot get beyond a despair at the duality of God's willing.

This primal willing is no mere privation of goodness or retreat from God's will, but announces itself continually in nature (S 7: 376-7). Nature is full of sickness and objects that arouse our disgust completely independently of their relation to God's will. While some might argue that monstrosities and moral perversions are contemptible only because they fail to live up to a divine plan, Leibniz's *Theodicy* demonstrates that even when such objects are found in conformity with a plan our disgust does not lessen. Such instances indicate that the dark will can be raised above the original appearance of nature

just as much as spirit is raised above the principle of light (S 7: 377). Schelling calls this elevation of the dark ground the “*general* evil which, even if not present in the very beginning, did begin in God’s revelation, having been awakened by the reaction of the ground. While this evil never comes to actualization, it continually strives [*strebt*] in that direction” (S 7: 380-1). In the longing that lies in the basis of all of nature, there is an impulse to evil which nevertheless is not actualized until it is paired with the impulse to universality in the human spirit.

This generality (or universality, as *Allgemeinheit* could also be rendered) of evil does not compel the human being to sin, but it does call her from out the simple self-sameness of the center, “just as a mysterious voice seems to call someone seized by vertigo on a high and precipitous summit to plunge down, or as in the ancient myth the irresistible song of the sirens rang out from the depths in order to draw mariners sailing through down into the whirlpool”¹¹² (S 7: 381). The very tendency that allows the human being to love, reason’s drive for unity with all being, becomes the possibility of evil when the drive to unify oneself with all being is inverted to a drive to submit all being to oneself. The relation between the human being and nature’s generalized solicitation to evil can only be properly conceived as a relation of existent to ground: “Fear [*Angst*] of life drives the human being out of the center in which he was created; for this center is, as the purest essence of all will, a consuming fire for every particular will; in order to be able to live in it the human being must die off [*absterben*] in all his ownhood, for which reason he must almost necessarily attempt to step out of it and into the periphery, in order

¹¹²The mention of the whirlpool here calls for a reexamination of the whirlpool metaphor Schelling was so fond of in the *Nature Philosophy* and *System of Transcendental Idealism*. If the moments in the history of consciousness are like whirlpools, then the danger and urgency of the call to reconstruct them perhaps needs to be investigated.

to seek there his selfhood” (S 7: 381). Human freedom, Schelling paradoxically suggests, consists in the “almost necessary” dying off of everything that makes the human being an individual.

That necessity is a vital component of freedom poses no significant difficulty for Schelling. If human freedom consisted simply in the ability to arbitrarily decide between two alternatives—to make the decision that Buridan’s ass could not—then human freedom would make no place at all for rationality. If the essence of human freedom were simply the irrationality of the ability of an indifferent subject to choose between two equal alternatives, then freedom would be indistinguishable from the non-freedom of having the choice made externally. Thus it should be clear, Schelling maintains, that “accident [*Zufall*] is impossible and conflicts with reason as with the necessary unity of the whole, and if freedom is to be saved by the complete accidentalness [*Zufälligkeit*] of actions, then there is no saving it at all” (S 7: 383). Genuine freedom is not a total lack of determination, but pulls itself from out of its ground in a determinate manner and hence consists of nothing but determination. And since a free being cannot be determined from without, the human being must always already have determined herself in her essence (*Wesen*) (S 7: 384).

Thus in the human being freedom and necessity are identical. Recalling Fichte’s famous formulation, Schelling notes that “the essence [*Wesen*] of the human being is essentially *his own deed* [*That*]; necessity and freedom stand together¹¹³ as one being [*Wesen*] which appears as one or the other when viewed from different aspects. In itself, it is freedom; formally, it is necessity” (S 7: 385). The human being, that is, cannot be

¹¹³Literally, “stand in one another” (*stehen ineinander*).

subjected to the opposition of necessity and freedom, for human freedom is inseparable from a formal necessity. Fichte had already realized (as Kant had implicitly)¹¹⁴ that since the human being is essentially her own deed, she could not be constituted by anything other than this deed. Yet Schelling distances himself from Fichte by arguing that “consciousness, insofar as it is thought of merely as apprehending the self or knowing the I, does not come first, but presupposes true being as does all mere cognition” (S 7: 385). In saying that the human being is her own deed, Schelling does not mean that we can consciously will ourselves into being. Rather, cognition is always indebted to something prior, which, if not fully being, nevertheless serves as its ground. What is usually taken as a conscious decision to act in a determinate way, either in accord with or contrary to the good, is epiphenomenal, for it is the deed itself that produces everything determinate about the self, including consciousness (S 7: 386).

Since spirit’s act of raising itself from this ground, of distinguishing between the light and dark principles, cannot be determined by anything else in time, it must be co-original with the creation of the universe—though as a free action it is separate from God’s act of creation (S 7: 385). The human being’s decision (*Entscheidung*) for good or evil thus occurs independently not only of anything temporal, but of time itself: “The act [*That*] by which his life in time is determined does not itself belong to time, but to

¹¹⁴Schelling finds it “noteworthy how Kant, who in his theory did not rise to a transcendental act determining all of the human being’s being, was led in later investigations by mere faithful observation of the phenomena of moral judgment to the recognition of (as he expressed it) a subjective ground of human actions preceding all acts in the domain of the senses, which itself had to be, in turn, an act of freedom. Fichte, however, who in his speculation had grasped the concept of such an act, again relapsed into the philanthropism then prevalent in his doctrine of normativity, and purported to find the evil preceding all empirical activity only in the inertia of human nature” (S 7: 388-9). Thus while it was Fichte who first stated that the human being is essentially her own action, it was Kant who more thoroughly investigated the meaning of this claim.

eternity, nor does it precede time, but moves through time (untouched by it) as an act by its nature eternal. Through this act the human being's life extends to the beginning of creation; thus through it he is beyond creation as well, free and himself eternal beginning" (S 7: 385-6). This atemporality is what distinguishes evil from the mere sickness of nature. Though the human being is doubtlessly exposed to passions and all other manner of contagion [*Contagium*] by which the forces of nature attempt to push her from the center, the radical evil of humanity precedes all such sickness (S 7: 388). More than a mere perversion of the human's natural drives, this evil is constitutive of reason itself.

Having thus shown how it is possible for evil to arise in the individual human being without denying the importance and power of reason, Schelling concludes that the only task remaining is to describe evil in the existing human being. As we have seen, evil is possible because human beings can raise their dark, selfish principles from the mere means of the good to a higher principle that dominates the universal will (S 7: 389). When the light principle completely infuses the dark one, "then God as eternal love, or as He who actually exists, is the bond of the forces in the human being. If both of these principles are in discord, however, then another spirit assumes the place where God should be, namely, the inverted [*umgekehrte*] God" (S 7: 389-90). Such a presumptuous spirit is not only sinful, but completely inaccessible to the understanding. Schelling compares it to "matter in the mind of the ancients, which cannot be grasped as actual (actualized) by the perfect understanding, but only by false imagination ($8 \equiv (4\Phi: \setminus < \bar{2}\Sigma)$),

which is identical with sin”¹¹⁵ (S 7: 390). In tempting the human being to selfishness or self-addiction (*Selbstsucht*), evil resists the forces of reason and the understanding and privileges the darkness and mendacity of the imagination. In order to conceive freedom as not merely a perversity within reason but as the potential for good and evil, reason must be suspended in favor of a kind of imagination that is itself sinful.¹¹⁶

With this we are finally in a position to see the significance of Schelling’s recentering of philosophy around existence rather than reason. “In the divine understanding,” Schelling writes, “there is a system; however, God himself is not a system, but a life” (S 7: 399). God is just as unable to comprehend evil as he is to will it—and indeed, contrary to Leibniz’s assertion, will and understanding are inseparable in divine revelation. The reality of evil subsists not in the divine understanding, but in God’s existence. When properly distinguished from its ground, “All existence requires a condition in order for it to become actual, i.e. personal, existence. God’s existence, too, could not be personal without such a condition, except that he has this condition *within* himself, not outside himself. He cannot annul this condition, for in that case he would have to annul himself; he can only overpower it through love and subordinate it to himself for his glorification” (S 7: 399). Thus while God does not will or participate in evil, its condition is eternally present in his existence. But unlike the human being who allows the dark principle of self-addiction to dominate the principle of light, God

¹¹⁵“ . . . wie die Materie der Alten, nicht mit dem vollkommenen Verstande, sondern nur durch falsche Imagination ($8 \equiv (4\Phi: \setminus < 2\Sigma)$)—welche eben die Sünde ist—als wirklich erfaßt werden kann.” On the next page, Schelling replaces *falsche Imagination* with *falsche Einbildung* (S 7: 391).

¹¹⁶For this reason, Wirth’s claim that for Schelling ethics is first philosophy in something like a Levinasian sense (Wirth 2005 7) is untenable. If philosophy begins with the acknowledgment of responsibility to the other, then we overlook the possibility of suspending responsibility so vital to Schelling’s new conception of philosophy’s task.

overpowers the dark ground of nature through universal love, and hence the dark ground so obtrusively present in human beings never appears in God. In contrast,

the human being never gains control of this condition, although in evil he strives to do so; it is only loaned to him, independent of him; thus his personality and selfhood can never rise to a perfect act. This is the sadness [*Traurigkeit*] clinging to all finite life, and if in God, too, there is a condition which is at least relatively independent, then within him there is a well of sadness, which, however, never comes to actuality, but serves only for the eternal joy of overcoming. Hence the veil of despondency [*Schwermuth*] spread over all of nature, the deep indestructible melancholy [*Melancholie*] of all life. (S 7: 399)

The counterpart to the utter lack of perversity in God's will to revelation is an eternal sadness in the lives of human beings. That which gives God his power and infinite goodness—the overpowering of the dark ground in nature—merely serves to emphasize the human being's fallenness and inability to get behind the conditions threatening to pervert reason.

A philosophy of freedom, one that seeks to place this sadness at the periphery rather than dwell in it, is thus not only beyond good and evil but beyond humanity and so beyond reason—beyond humanity because the suspension of the opposition of good and evil raises philosophy beyond the uniquely human condition of an unbridgeable gulf between ground and existence, and beyond reason because this gulf is constitutive of reason's grounding urge for separation. At the same time, we miss the radical metaphysical humility of the *Freiheitsschrift* if we take Schelling to have discovered a superhuman or superrational unity of ground and existence in God. Such a fantasy in fact falls into what Schelling calls evil: placing oneself where God should be, or in other words, positing a unity of oneself and the world from out of self-regard. Whereas a philosophy that places reason at its center (like the first five parts of the *System of*

Transcendental Idealism) will confront all separation by renouncing the limitations of its self-conception and self-addiction and expanding itself indefinitely through the spirit of universal love, the *Freiheitsschrift* investigates the limitations the division of ground and existence places on such an indefinite expansion.

More specifically, Schelling denies that there is either a unity or a disunity between ground and existence (S 7: 406). If there is a unity, then thinking falls once again into the night in which all cows are black. Or rather, we would not even be able to say, with the consciousness of Hegel's sense-certainty, that "now is night" (H 9: 64, ¶95), as we could no longer distinguish between the light and dark principles. If, on the other hand, we assume an eternal dualism of ground and existence, then we remain within the orbit of reason, but now as the despair of a reason unable to unify its two basic principles. To escape this orbit, Schelling instead looks to the indifference of the distinction between ground and existence, or what he calls the *unground* (*Ungrund*):

there must be a being [*Wesen*] *before* all ground and before all existence, thus before any duality at all; how can we call this anything but the original ground [*Urgrund*], or rather the *unground* [*Ungrund*]? Since it precedes all opposites, these cannot be differentiated within it or be in any way present within it. Thus it cannot be designated as the identity of opposites, but only as their absolute *indifference* (S 7: 406).

Since it precedes the opposition of ground and existence, the unground is not a product of this or any other pair of opposites, "nor are they contained in it implicitly; rather, it is a being [*Wesen*] of its own, separated from all opposition, on which all opposites are broken, which is nothing other than their very non-being, and which therefore has no predicate except predicatelessness, without therefore being a nothing [*Nichts*] or an absurdity [*Unding*]" (S 7: 406). In order to think the freedom contained in the ground of all being, we need to suspend reason's urge to overcome separation in a higher unity, for

to attempt to smuggle the conceptual oppositions of existence and ground or good and evil back into this indifference would reject its very indifference and make it just another product of rational synthesis. “However,” Schelling observes, “nothing hinders their being predicated of it as non-opposites, i.e., in disjunction [*Disjunktion*] and each *for itself*; whereby, however, this very duality (the actual twofoldness [*Zweiheit*] of the principles) is posited” (S 7: 407). Unlike opposition, disjunction or twofoldness grants the reality of the light and dark principles without forcing them to be defined in terms of one another. Prior to the opposition of good and evil is the spirit of love, in which good and evil are completely undifferentiated (S 7: 408). Ground and existence are together indifferently in love, and it is only through this loving indifference that there can be such a thing as the spirit that strives to incorporate its ground into its existence. The incorporative drive of reason is thus grounded not in a desire to cancel an original separation (as, for instance, in Aristophanes’s speech in the *Symposium*), but in an original indifference that was neither a union nor a separation, but simply a disjunction of all principles. Love, the nonbinding bond of ground and existence, allows ground and existence to be alongside one another in a mutually dependent non-necessitation. Beyond this, the unground cannot be further analyzed, for “this is the mystery of love, that it combines what could be for itself [*für sich*] and yet is not and cannot be without the other” (S 7: 408).¹¹⁷ To attempt to specify a further generality under which indifferent

¹¹⁷ Schelling says nothing more in the *Freedom* essay that would help unpack what he means by the indifference of love, but strangely enough, we find a similar exploration in Hegel’s 1797-8 “Love” fragment: “True union, or love proper, exists only between living beings who are alike in power and thus in one another’s eyes living beings from every point of view; in no respect is either dead for the other. This genuine love excludes all oppositions. It is not the understanding, whose relations always leave the manifold of related terms as a manifold and whose unity is always a unity of opposites. It is not

love is possible would distort the *Freedom* essay's discovery that God is not merely the immanence of reason in all things, but a living personality (S 7: 411-2).

But unlike the indifference at which the Identity Philosophy arrives, the *Freiheitsschrift*'s prioritization of indifference does not force philosophy back into the night in which all cows are black. Whereas in the Identity Philosophy Schelling placed both existence and its ground together in the absolute identity of reason, the *Freiheitsschrift* forestalls from the very beginning the possibility that ground and existence could form an identity. As the ground of God's existence, "nature in general is everything that lies beyond the absolute being [*Seyn*] of absolute identity" (S 7: 458). Though Schelling describes nature as a longing for identity, he does not for this reason define it in terms of identity. Whereas a philosophy that places reason at the center would seek to describe the inchoate ground in terms of what it gives birth to, the *Freedom* essay aims to show the distance of intelligibility from its ground in nature. The ground of God is beyond any system of identity in the sense that the divine understanding can never hope to incorporate it. But even more, the philosophy Schelling inaugurates with the *Freiheitsschrift* is beyond all system because it remains indifferent to the closure of the system. By placing reason at the periphery of his investigations, Schelling is able to speak meaningfully of the absolute without dissolving everything into an undifferentiated reason. He shows that the essence of human freedom consists in the real possibility for both good and evil and in what this possibility consists without placing this

reason either, because reason sharply opposes its determining power to what is determined. Love neither restricts nor is restricted; it is not finite at all. It is a feeling, yet not a single feeling. A single feeling is only a part and not the whole of life. . . . This whole life is not contained in love in the same way as it is in this sum of many particular and isolated feelings; in love, life is present as a duplicate of itself and as a single and unified self" (*Early Theological Writings* 304-5).

possibility in a system of the divine understanding or allowing reason to find itself in its origin. For this reason, I believe we can be more definitive than Sallis lets on at the end of the second edition of his *Delimitations*:

Does the return to the indifferent origin not risk merely replacing the ground that remains ever secluded with another ground in which all seclusion would be prohibited in the interest of indifferent unity, posing here, in the text in which one would least have expected such a move, its indifferent absolute as the night in which, as one tends to say, all cows are black? Summoning up the specter of metaphysics at the end of metaphysics. (Sallis 1995 232)

If the *Freiheitsschrift* were structured around such a return to the unground that serves as the condition for the possibility of intelligible differences, then Schelling would indeed again be faced with the “night in which all cows are black” problem. The difference between ground and existence that Schelling labors so hard to specify would dissolve into the same lack of differentiation with which all inquiry begins. But such a homecoming is neither the aim nor the result of the essay. Instead, Schelling ends the essay by leaving identity and difference on the periphery of his inquiry into human freedom. Rather than oscillating between determination and indeterminacy, the *Freiheitsschrift* aims to hold onto each, but only by recognizing that neither is the center.

Yet this manner of preservation should not be confused with the sacrificial suspension Hegel describes as absolute knowing, for it calls into question the very gallery in which spirit’s contradictory moments are to be preserved. At the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, reason, as one moment in spirit’s dialectic, reappears as spatialized in the gallery of images that constitutes absolute knowing. As such, reason is not only indebted to the freedom that allows all spirit’s moments to appear alongside one another, but helps constitute this freedom. And as we saw in Chapter 5, spirit’s ability to

progress through the dialectic and recollect its progress is in large part determined through reason's experience as negater and preserver of finite conceptions of reality. But with the *Freiheitsschrift*, finitude is placed to the side. Like the identity philosophy, the *Freiheitsschrift* suspends not only the oppositions that keep spirit finite, but reason's very drive for preserving its past and incomplete forms of cognition. When reason is placed at the periphery of philosophy, philosophy's central line of inquiry concerns an unground in which all distinctions not only dissolve, but are annihilated. In the effort to solve the Spinozistic riddle of how the infinite is related to the finite, Schelling suspends all striving for an adequate concept of the connection and instead points to the conceptually indeterminable indifference in the unground of ground and existence.

Oddly enough, then, Schelling's emphasis on indifference in the fundamental oppositions governing thought, spirit, and life leaves his vision of philosophy's task less indifferent than Hegel's in the Absolute Knowing section of the *Phenomenology*. Whereas for Hegel the suspension of reason means recognizing its essential incompleteness and placing it alongside other moments of spirit, for Schelling it means returning it to the periphery of philosophical inquiry so as to hinder its inevitable urge to make *itself* the center. In confronting reason's sinfulness, Schelling replaces the flattened spatiality of Hegel's absolute knowing with a planetary spatiality that is anything but indifferent to reason's place in knowing.¹¹⁸ Reason's place is at risk, and if there is a Hegelian gallery where reason is to be preserved, then it stands unguarded at the periphery of the absolute.

¹¹⁸For a provocative offhand reflection on the difficulty of specifying whether this center is empty or full, see Krell 1988 17n3.

Conclusion: The Space of Indifference

The grounds for Hegel's assertion on the opening page of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that a preface to a work of philosophy "seems not only superfluous but, in view of the nature of the subject matter, even inappropriate and misleading" (H 9: 9, ¶1) should by now be apparent (cf. Sallis 1995, 40 ff.). In any work that opens up new lines of thought, a statement of intentions will be superfluous because in order to understand it one must already have finished the work, inappropriate because it can only present the text's suspended moments as static results, and misleading because it implies the existence of external intentions ruling over the free movement of the text. And yet in the *Phenomenology* (as in his other major works), Hegel decided to put these objections out of play, recognizing the necessity of a preface despite its impossibility. All the same, he was not so bold as to supplement the work with a conclusion—an addition perhaps even more superfluous and misleading than a preface. For even more than a preface, a conclusion implies the cancellation of a text's spacing, a reduction of its life to a dead product and of its death to an inevitable and irreversible dialectical movement. Aware of this impossibility of concluding (and facing a career-threatening deadline), Hegel accordingly ended the *Phenomenology* not by triumphantly announcing the standpoint it had reached or summarizing its contents, but instead by simply pointing back to them, asking that they be reviewed and appreciated as if in a gallery.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹For this reason, facile attempts to express the "spirit" of the *Phenomenology*, such as Solomon's statement that the absolute is "a principle of irreducible complexity" (p. 478), inevitably fail. Absolute knowing cannot be a principle because it suspends its self-certainty, and it cannot include an irreducible complexity because the dialectics of perception and morality have led it to suspend its conceptions of irreducibility and internal differentiation.

But before we go too far in praising Hegel's restraint, we should note that the *Science of Logic*, as the first part of Hegel's system, was at first conceived as a kind of conclusion to the *Phenomenology*. Rather than a suspension of the dialectics of morality and forgiveness that allows the concept to develop independently of the limitations of human spirit (but having, therefore, only an indeterminate and immeasurable relation to phenomenology [see Chapter 4, above]), Hegel takes this science as an "expanded arrangement" of the work of the *Phenomenology*, thus preparing the system to incorporate phenomenology as a mere moment (H 11: 8). The *Science of Logic* is thus not at all the mere "supplement" Hegel professes it to be in its first (1812) Preface, but instead attempts to draw phenomenology to a close on the grounds that the development of consciousness "rests solely on the nature of the pure essentialities which constitute the content of logic" (H 11: 8). If, then, our goal is to suspend the negativity of dialectical temporality, we should be just as suspicious of this sort of conclusion, which seeks to integrate the text into a larger network, as we are of the sort that aims to distill and reiterate the text's content. Neither respects the text indifferently, and both aggravate the violence already discharged in a preface.

And yet, Hegel would not have ignored the lesson of the *Phenomenology* without a reason. At work here, I would like to suggest, is the converse of Schelling's resistance to "Dogmatic Transcendent Idealism." In Chapter 3, we saw Schelling criticize the fallacy that mistakes consciousness's need for determination in general for the grounds for a particular sort of determination. Although nothing at all could *be* if the subject were not determined to be in some particular way, this fact by itself does not permit us to deduce spatiality, temporality, or any other structure limiting cognition (S 3: 410). To

prevent a system of reason from overstepping its bounds, we must allow reason's self-certainty to come into question through its confrontation with something it genuinely cannot encompass. If, on the other hand, the absolute is not the beginning of our philosophical endeavors, but the end, then the aim is not to show how the need for general determinacy in the absolute yields specific determinacy, but to preserve a general determinacy amid the gallery of individual determinate moments of spirit. While presenting this general determinacy as a science forces us to abandon spirit's recognition of the spacing of its moments, neglecting to present it at all would ignore the need for absolute spirit to posit a science in the first place. A community that has passed through the dialectics of morality and religion and seen the need for universal recognition and forgiveness can respect individual differences even when there is no commonality underlying them, but so long as we fail to conceive what difference itself is, this respect is at risk of dissolving. In the absence of a single substance or telos underlying every moment of spirit, we need to show what it means for them to lie alongside one another such that they do not waste away in pure individuality. In other words, we need an adequate expression of indifference, of the equilibrium of the centripetal force that keeps reason's unifying impulse from abandoning thinking entirely and the centrifugal force that prevents it from installing the concept as the alpha and omega of thought.

To recall Schelling's negative expression from the *Erlangen Lectures*, this equilibrium, this indifference, is the priority of thought (though not any particular thought) to all errancy, perversion, and sickness (S 9: 241). But since (as Hegel had already suggested in the *Differenzschrift* and worked out more fully in Chapter 5 of the *Phenomenology* and Schelling brings to full explicitness in the *Freiheitsschrift*) the

possibility of errancy is constitutive of knowledge, just as perversion is of the moral law and sickness is of life, this indifference is never something known, enacted, or lived. As such, all the localized indifferences we experience when, for example, we subordinate the drive for recognition to life itself or rise above the pettiness of the spiritual animal kingdom do not even approximate the indifferent love that makes liberal spacing possible. Accordingly, the movement to this spacing is incomprehensible on the model of previous dialectical transitions, and a positive definition of indifference must be sought. Since the negativity of time determines spirit's movement from one moment to the next, reconceiving these movements as free interrelations among spatially related moments calls for a philosophy centered around freedom rather than reason.

But as the *Freedom* essay's wriggles and tremors so palpably demonstrate, expelling reason from philosophy's center risks reinstating the onesided errancy that reason criticizes. For along with Dogmatic Transcendent Idealism and transcendent employments of the understanding in general, reason strives to correct all forms of disease and perversion. And indeed, as Schelling's *Nature Philosophy* and *Transcendental Idealism* show, reason does not just grow out of need and lack, but makes need and lack conceivable in the first place. While sickness cannot exist without a substratum of life to pervert, life is equally dependent upon disease, as the basic striving that defines life would be unintelligible without a separation and conflict of forces. In establishing reason's place in philosophy, we must be careful not to renew the understanding's mistake of absolutizing this conflict. While perversions are inevitable in reason's striving for unity, this does not justify reducing thought to an abyssal conflict of forces. Such a move would merely replace the tyranny of reason with the anarchy of the

understanding. Both reason's nostalgia for an imagined age before its fissure and the understanding's zeal to carve up the past according to its own artificially imposed constraints imagine that they can determine the relation of reason to its ground—and are, as such, “evil” in Schelling's terminology, attempting to place their individual, peripheral striving at the center of life. The effort to expunge this evil by restoring the proper relationship of center to periphery will always tend either to multiply the evil by instating reason as the arbiter of claims to the center or to banish reason from the center forever. Schelling's challenge, only partially met, is to confront this evil with indifference, to specify how reason can remain active yet respectful of its distance from the center. By showing that reason is neither entirely self-grounding nor grounded in nature's circulation of forces, the *Freedom* essay begins to carve out a place where reason can be positively determined as freely given.

Like the *Darstellung*'s formalized model of presentation, this positive presentation would have to suspend the tiresome work and constant striving of a synthetic or dialectical method. As Schelling shows in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, reason sustains itself not by simply positing its separation from the world so as to precipitate a homecoming, but by allowing demands to be placed upon it (S 3: 541). Reason's unique form of freedom arises from the fact that a demand's origin is simultaneously internal and external. Practical reason is free because it takes its self-determination as arising externally while recognizing that all demands made upon it can only arise from within. By denying any externality in reason's activity from the beginning, the Identity Philosophy ceases to be structured by the demand and thus opens for reason a space of play. While Hegel derided this irresponsibility to the “labor of the

negative” as “love playing with itself” (H 9: 18, ¶19), he still recognized in Schelling’s Nature Philosophy a counterweight to the obsessive seriousness of observing reason (H 9: 166, ¶297). By suspending the sense of responsibility that internalizes every demand, a playful approach to nature offers rest from reason’s incessant striving. But reason could never be satisfied with such an indeterminate vision of its activity, and it is difficult to conceive how either formalistic self-absorption or shirking the labor of the negative could suffice for an adequate presentation of indifference. Nor does it help to think of indifference as an alternation between responsibility and irresponsibility, to demand, as it were, a forty-hour rational workweek. Such a move would merely reintroduce the negativity of time with no more attention to the liberality of space than a purely negative dialectic.

To set reason into a loving free play with its other, the key is not to oscillate between reason and non-reason, but to establish a kind of spacing that preserves reason neither as suspended nor as self-certain. What we are looking for is a formalization that is *given* in reason, not taken by it, an understanding of how reason not only constructs itself (in) a second nature, but is at home in this one. Such an understanding could only be presented in the conclusion Hegel and Schelling never managed to write. Concluding their work on the ascension, life, and suspension of reason would call for a superfluous review of its striving to overcome original separation, an inappropriate mixture of work and play, and the misleading implication that it has earned its place through a life of striving.

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Unless a translator is listed below, translations from all German texts and Leibniz's French ones are my own, although I have liberally borrowed from existing English translations without crediting them. References to Schelling, Hegel, Kant, Fichte, Heidegger, Feuerbach, and Leibniz give their last initial (or full name for Heidegger, Feuerbach and Leibniz), followed by the standard German edition (listed below), with volume and page numbers. Thus "H 9: 45" refers to volume 9, page 45 of the *Akademie* edition of Hegel's complete works. The only exceptions are Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, for which I have given the original "A" and "B" pagination and Hegel's *Love* fragment, which has not yet appeared in the *Akademie* edition. "HV" refers to the *Akademie* edition of Hegel's lectures. All references to Fichte and Schelling are to Series 1 of their respective *sämtlichen Werken*. Unless otherwise specified, I have maintained the original emphasis in all quotations.

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