

SELF-CORRECTING PATHS OF NEGATIVITY AND THE POSITIVE IN NATURE: A REVISITING OF SCHELLING

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ABSTRACT: In the background of a renewed interest in Schelling's late philosophy, the paper briefly explores several of his critical philosophical formulations integral to the beginnings and further development of the positive turn. This study begins with key insights in the Freedom essay, progressing into the Ages of the World and some later reflections on the conceptual and historical intricacies of mythology and revelation. I assign these works and formulations the function of serving as parallel vectors to the chronological unfolding of the positive or the 'positive revealed'. For Schelling, the positive, which, in the final analysis, is nothing but God revealed by knowledge and 'only in knowledge', can only be posited from the negative, undergoing a rigorous self-correction process. In the paper, this process centres around the intricacies of explaining evil and the concepts of dual external worlds, parallel vectoring, reminiscent of Spinoza, the un-sublatable, etc., among other concepts that convey the naturalist underpinnings of Schelling's positive philosophy. For comparative purposes, I will emphasise that this self-correction process shows the extent to which Hegel's system can be considered a congruent path of negativity or flight of negativity coeval to the historical stages of realising the positive. The internal completion of Hegel's system thus depends on the negative unfolding of knowledge in which the dialectic and its mediation process could only assume a minor role.

KEYWORDS: Mythology; Negativity; Positive philosophy; Revelation; Sublation; Unprethinkable

INTRODUCTION

After his two major works on *Naturphilosophie*,¹ Schelling published a general

¹ The *Ideas for A Philosophy of Nature* first published in 1797 and *First Outline of A System of the Philosophy of Nature* that came out two years later (1799). Schelling also wrote the introduction to *First Outline*, published in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, but was only later translated to English in 1867. See F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for A Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988;

response to the Kantian problem of the unity of apperception that his former friend and early intellectual influence, J.G. Fichte, offered to resolve through the concept of self-positing I. Schelling's criticisms of Kant and Fichte in the *System of Transcendental Idealism of 1800 (STI)* yielded a non-reflective unity of reason and nature, which corresponds to two systems, each working out a separate a priori science, transcendental philosophy and philosophy of nature. Aesthetics first hinted at a model of attaining this unity, later complemented by geometry and mathematical models of a priori construction in two subsequent speculative tracts. I am referring to the "Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy" of 1802 (*FP*), following a shorter treatise a year before, the "Presentation of My System of Philosophy" of 1801 (*PMS*).² These two works defined the so-called identity-system period of Schelling's philosophical youth.³

The identity system is a crucial prelude to the complete transition of transcendental philosophy into a point at which, Schelling contends, "all ideal determinations [are] conjoined ... so that in the totality they return to *absolute identity*."⁴ In this sense, the totality of the 'I think' (of transcendental philosophy) which presupposes all a priori cognition and the possibility of experience itself, passes from reflection to the "full working out of a science" (*FP*, 225).

A year after publishing the last of his two identity system essays, the *Further Presentations*, Schelling left Jena to teach at Würzburg. During that time, he published a shorter treatise, *Philosophy and Religion* (1804). Schelling's critics took

henceforth *IPN*; *First Outline of A System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith R. Peterson, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004./1799; henceforth, *FO*.

² In the *Philosophy of Art*, Schelling (1989/1804-1805) would describe the simple relation between mathematical construction and aesthetic construction in terms of its common root in the 'symbolic': "[T]hinking is simple schematization; all action, in contrast, is allegorical (since as a particular it means or signifies a universal); art is symbolic. This distinction can also be applied to the sciences. Arithmetic allegorizes, since it signifies the universal through the particular. Geometry can be said to schematize to the extent that it designates the particular through the universal or general. Finally, philosophy is the symbolic science among these" (p.48). See F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophy of Art*, trans. and ed. Douglas W. Stott, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

³ Iain Hamilton Grant (2006) prefers to use 'identity system' rather than 'system of identity,' underscoring the generative function of nature (compared to system) in Schelling's conception of identity. See Iain Hamilton Grant, *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling*, London: Continuum, 2006, pp. 1-2; henceforth, *PNS*.

⁴ F.W.J. Schelling, "Further Presentations from the System of Philosophy (1802) [Extract]," In *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondences, 1800-1802*, ed. Michael Vater and David Wood, 141-225, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012/1801-1802, p. 225; henceforth, *FP*.

the book as a follow-up elaboration of the identity system he pioneered at Jena (around the time, Hegel was still a collaborator). The book spent a good deal expounding on his debate with Karl Eschenmayer, a long-time admirer of his works. Subsequently, the treatise's unprofessional reception and his falling out with Eschenmayer thrust Schelling into the unexpected limelight.⁵ The subsequent writing of the *Freedom* essay (1809), which became arguably one of the late 18th-century's most controversial philosophical *oeuvres*, at least in the continental tradition, is perhaps Schelling's most defining work.

The *Freiheitsschrift* (*Freedom* essay)⁶ is a crucial transition text, claiming to mediate the 'schematism' of Jena's identity system (1801-1802) and the Würzburg's *Philosophy and Religion* (1804). The mediation itself presents a new form of expressing freedom, between the post-Kantian notion of subjectivity (integral to the identity system) and the Würzburg's treatise outlining the possibility of freedom uniting with a system that, on appearances, is dismissive of its moral independence. The mediation yields the exact condition, Schelling asserts, for freedom to "purge itself into an identity with the infinite" (*PR*, 49). This formulation points to a necessary trajectory concerning a radical concept of creation that Schelling would outline in the Würzburg's text, problematising freedom's encounter with the phenomenon of evil. *Philosophy and Religion* defines creation as a 'falling-away' from the Absolute, whose sense or meaning is unmistakable: "the original Sin is not the Fall of Man, but rather Creation itself" (Ottmann in *PR*, xii). Creation is none other than the realm of appearances. Appearances are evil in themselves. In this light, the co-determination of sensuousness with reason in the sphere of created things situates freedom within a permanent moral dilemma. Add to the contradiction the omnipresence of life's indifference to good and evil.

But life's indifference does not mean that all interests in life, such as the will to love and knowledge, are without meaning and purpose. The *Freedom* essay is set against the background of life's indifference that in spite of itself rejects a world without meaning, devoid of the sense of ground (*Ungrund*). Recall that Kant, in

⁵ See K. Ottmann, "Introduction." *Philosophy and Religion*, trans. K. Ottman, vii-xxi. Putnam, Connecticut: Spring Publication, Inc., 2010; henceforth, *PR*.

⁶ F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt, New York: State University of New York Press, 2006/1809; henceforth, *PEH*.

the first *Critique* (Part 2 of the Transcendental Logic), refers to the necessity of the ‘abyss of reason’ in line with the presupposition of ‘unconditioned necessity’ that alone can support reason’s autonomy from outside its self-imposed limits.⁷ Yet, despite its indifference, life refuses to let its lack of interest in human will and reason by pushing everything it touches into proximity with the abyssal foundation of the understanding (which also at the same time exhibits its indifference to existence). Already this indicates a certain ‘duplicitous activity’ (*FO*, 87) on the part of life (that nature originates). In turn, to avoid the ‘fall’, the understanding rallies around the categories and a prioris of reason, wary of regressing to dogmatic assertions of thought. In this context, abyssal reasoning implies a profound acknowledgement of the ‘unconditioned necessity’, which also necessitates the recognition of the autonomous assertion of the ‘primal goodness of the will’ (life, broadly construed), whose virtue resides in not deviating from actuality (or not taking the fall) – as Schelling asserts, the good “in created beings” only “strives toward actuality” (*PEH*, 44).

Besides the purpose of prompting reason to avoid taking the fall in the sense that the abyssal limit of the understanding designates autonomy within the bounds of possible experience, actuality also secures reality from ontological reductionism based on an undisclosed idea of fate, finalisation, and closure. This option of reason is characteristic of dogmatism. Thus, by “[striving] to preserve its being,”⁸ actuality reveals the inherent purpose of evil (*PR*, 31). Understood outside of its theological purchase, evil is the only active force in nature (by all means, an unconditioned necessity), the “most positive in what nature contains” (*PEH*, 37) that prevents absolute deviation in the form of a closed system or creed. (I will elaborate on this aspect in the later sections of the paper).

THE NATURALIST UNDERPINNINGS OF SCHELLING’S PHILOSOPHY

This formulation, however, is not without its naturalist underpinnings. Nature begets life such that life itself unfolds in a self-inhibiting manner. Life attests to

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996, p. 594; A613/B641.

⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” in *The Philosophical Rupture Between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondences, 1800-1802*, ed. Michael Vater and David, New York: State University of New York Press, 2012/1801-1802, p. 171; henceforth, *PMS*.

the productivity of nature, in which “if it were only an infinite evolution,” as Schelling writes of his *Naturphilosophie*, the presence of a “negative factor” or a “retarding force” within it must explain why nature is prevented “from reaching its end” (*FO*, 17). Otherwise, an infinite evolution would render the *produced* (the product, such as life) impossible to emerge from the production process. Here the natural end of nature’s eternal production is thwarted in the sense that its process is localised, which explains the emergence of freedom. Nature compels its product to reproduce its inhibition as freely as possible (parallel to nature’s freedom to produce on account of its self-inhibiting force). The product freely expresses nature’s inhibited activity, even as it allows its products to maintain a “dual external world” (*ibid.*, p. 107). It is in this sense that natural productivity inheres in the product to such an extent that it is identical to it, but only as an ‘identity in duplicity’ (*ibid.*, 116). The organism expresses the inhibition of nature as freely as possible, which prevents nature from progressing to infinity, to eternal production without products being produced (which is absurd).

In transcendental terms, apropos the correlation between the philosophy of nature and transcendental philosophy (which borders on the ‘infinite’, as the Würzburg’s lectures indicate), a correlation that organises the terms of an expanded philosophy of nature beyond the identity system itself,⁹ the self-inhibition of nature is reflected in the postulate of the moral will. Moral propositions themselves originated from nature’s activity. Nature allows the generation of moral propositions, but they do not produce them. It is freedom that makes them. The condition of possibility of which is itself produced by nature’s self-inhibiting process, that is to say, produced (which is an impersonal process) and *not created*. There is no direct route between product and production, which would have been the case if nature could tell us precisely what to produce at the outset. In relation to the phenomenon of evil, this *gap* points to the *necessity of a ground* that secures the production process from deviating from ‘actuality’ that sustains the relation between nature and organism via the *dual external world*.

More importantly, this can give us a glimpse of how evil concretises itself in the world. The actual correlation between the finite world and the infinite, the

⁹ In Gord Barentsen’s essay on Schelling, this amounts to the attempt on Schelling’s part to “rein in Nature’s infinite productivity by synchronizing it with transcendental idealism” (See Gord Barentsen, “Schelling’s Dark Nature and the Prospects for ‘Ecological Civilisation’,” *Cosmos and History*, 14, 1, 2019, p. 96).

organism and nature, takes shape as a form of “reciprocal yielding in contest”¹⁰ (in the manner of the aesthetic that Schelling initially described in an earlier text) out of which an ethical organism arises. In *Philosophy and Religion*, this ethical agency confronts the paradox of creation. To the extent that creation is the outcome of “complete falling-away from [the absolute] by means of a leap [*Sprung*]” (*PR*, 26), according to which history is to be regarded as an ‘evolving revelation’ of this falling-away (*ibid.*, p. 44), “it is in world history;” as Hegel himself would assert, that humans “encounter the total mass of concrete evils.”¹¹ (Once again, as to its naturalist underpinnings, the ‘leap’ transpires as freedom necessitated by nature’s ‘negative’ or ‘retarding’ force, just as much as being ‘snatched’ from it). In Hegelian terms, concrete (historical) evil is the opposite of non-deviation from actuality – the “separation from the universal end”¹² – that logical mediation seeks to resolve by historical means through the sovereignty of reason. In short, evil is to be resolved within history. But one should look at this history as the unfolding of Providence to ensure evil will not historically prevail at the end, reminiscent of the Stoic presumption of the finality of outcomes in the hands of the divine (that no cognition could master).

In the end, Hegel had to rely on the theodicy of evil, which only deepened the gap between the Absolute and finite consciousness, that is, within the system he formulated. The historical resolution of evil does not resolve its problematic derivation from a presumed revealed theodicy that Hegel put forward in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (*PWH*, 15). However, in Schellingian terms, if originary evil is co-temporal with creation, no history will be enough to sublimate ‘deviation’. (Schelling would rather that the problem of evil be graspable from the natural foundation of things). Theoretically, only a logic of exclusion can render sublation necessary, the exclusion of nature from its correlation with evil. (This is one of the paper’s central arguments that I will discuss in the succeeding sections).

For the paper’s purpose, I assign Schelling’s significant formulations in the

¹⁰ F.W.J., *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays*, trans. Fritz Marti, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 157.

¹¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, Vol. 1, trans. Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011, p. 86; henceforth, *PWH*.

¹² G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 288; henceforth, *PS*.

Freedom essay, the *Ages of the World*, and his later insights on mythology and revelation, the task of reactivating the inquiry into the nature of the ‘excluded.’ The presentation of the ‘excluded,’ or, more precisely, the *Darstellung* of the reverse progression of history from the ideal into the real, marks the positive turn in the life of the spirit. The inversion of Hegel’s concept of history, from mere idealism to the metaphysical empiricism of the unity of reason and nature, significantly characterises this ‘turn.’ As Bruce Matthews (2007) annotates this crucial intervention with the dialectic, “Hegel’s philosophy would be true only if reality itself were stood on its head.”¹³ The paper thus attempts to demonstrate an approach within Schelling’s philosophy characterised by a naturalist re-construction of the a priori ground of freedom that rescues Hegel’s system from the idealism that lacks a proper grounding in nature. Accordingly, the *Freedom essay* commences the course of the self-correction of the negative (the idealist recognition of the proper ground of freedom) that Hegel’s system apparently lacks, owing to the dialectic’s central premise – that nature can be sublated.

THE POSITIVE TURN

In the 1811 draft, among the surviving fragments of *The Ages of the World*, Schelling alludes to how philosophy itself must ‘fall silent’ before the disintegration of reason. That is to say, how reason can engage “this falling silent of knowledge [*Verstummen der Wissenschaft*] ... such that it is impossible actually to know anything at all” (*WA*, 103).¹⁴ ‘Silence’ is not a capitulation to Hegel’s apparent end of history thesis, the end of thinking that may potentially transform reason into a faculty strictly designed to absorb the commands of truth such that one becomes a passive recipient of absolute knowledge as it transpires in history.

As a digression, one has to acknowledge that in Hegelian terms (in the sense that Catholicism at one point dominated the geopolitics of the globe), *world-history* has ended in the turn to the modern secular state anticipated by the Reformation. The main historical shift occurred in the Reformation’s challenge to the

¹³ Bruce Matthews, “Introduction,” in *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 60; henceforth, *GPP*.

¹⁴ See Jason Wirth, “Introduction,” in *The Ages of the World*, xxvii, translated and quoted by Wirth from the 1946 German edition of the 1811 and 1813 drafts of the *Ages*. See F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Jason M. Wirth, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000/1815. Reference to the *Ages* is indicated henceforth by *WA*.

infallibility of the Pope, bolstered by the structural condition of political life that established the separation of political principles from institutions, spirit embodied in the ethical life from civil society, and authority from the public. As Hegel reiterates, with the legacy of Lutheran Protestantism in mind,

The peculiar nature of a religion which does not acknowledge the independent and substantial existence of justice and ethical life does make it necessary for the political constitution to be separated from religion itself; but if political principles and institutions are divorced from the realm of inwardness, from the innermost shrine of conscience, from the still sanctuary of religion, they lack any real centre and remain abstract and indeterminate. (*PWH*, 104)

The birth of the modern nation-state, or the whole idea of ‘secularity’, was a Christian discovery “but rendered explicit at the Reformation.”¹⁵ Nonetheless, the secular turn did not historically resonate with Spirit and religion “becoming identical to each other,” whereby religion becomes “actual to itself and object of its consciousness” (*PS*, 412). The Reformation did not afford history its moment to finally establish itself as a self-determining totality, as it “ceased to refer to the past” (*EH*, 119). Instead, it remains so much a fantasy oriented toward the future. If history already destroyed the past, which the Reformation accelerated but without a self-fulfilling course of totality to mark off the present, history becomes solely a projection of this “future fantasy,” and thus, “may truly be said to have ended” (*EH*, 119). The future of Reformation is not of this world, just as much as Christianity ended in this world.

What ended within Christianity is its ‘historic claim’ which Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, already referring to the death of God, philosophically exalted in the actions of Luther, sought to re-establish, albeit speculatively. It is in this sense that Hegel took to task the Christian celebration of the Good Friday. The death of God could only be justifiably celebrated if it is all done in the context of the Christian world embracing the “whole truth and harshness of its God-forsakenness.”¹⁶

After Hegel, the speculative philosophy that sought to rationalise this ‘God-forsakenness’ expressed itself in its fullest and mature form, courtesy of

¹⁵ Nicholas Boyle, “Hegel and the End of History,” *New Blackfriars* 6, no. 3, 1995, pp. 164-174; henceforth, *EH*.

¹⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris, New York: State University of New York Press, 1977.

Feuerbach: “The necessary turning point of history is ... the open confession that the consciousness of God is nothing else than the consciousness of the species.”¹⁷ One is right to suspect that this confessional consciousness is the true expression of the Hegelian dialectic that could only freely thrive in the wake of the death of God. Freedom is determinately asserted. But also, it is in the same context that we can situate Schelling’s post-theological notion of silence (mentioned in the opening of this section).

SILENCE AS A FOIL TO THE EXPANSION OF PERSONALITY

Silence is a form of performative thinking which articulates, in the highest creative manner possible, the voided expression of the otherwise originary *inexpressibility* of the essence of freedom, which, as one could glean from Feuerbach’s interpretation of speculative philosophy, is rather anthropomorphically asserted – the ‘consciousness of the human species’. The subjective assertion of reason voids the originary indeterminacy of freedom in order to make it determinate, for instance, as Substance, which, as Hegel asserted, “shows itself to be essentially the Subject” (*PS*, 21). The subjective derivation of this form of expression comes to light, as Schelling offered a counter-argument, in terms of the “expansion of personality to infinity, or, “the infinite continuation of the I, immortality” (*IPP*, 99).

The appropriation of this anthropocentric alternative to the ‘end of history’ via the ‘expansion of personality’ reflects Schelling’s lament “of how infinitely far everything personal reaches such that it is impossible to know anything at all” (*ibid.*). This ‘infinite continuation of the I’ has only one goal: the destruction of the world as an “embodiment of finiteness” (in modern-day terms, epitomised by global consumerism) through the perfection of the I or subjective reason that turns the world into an infinite that has ‘no personality’ and ‘knows no object’, hence, essentially the accelerating expansion *qua* erasure of the subject into the infinite, which means its extinction. (I mean ‘extinction’ in the sense that the subject becomes a willing agent of destruction in proportion to a purely formal expression of freedom that it is left to possess).

We can then situate the significance of the *Freiheitsschrift* in this acceleration of

¹⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot, New York: Prometheus Books, 1989, 270; henceforth, *EC*.

finiteness. At this point, Schelling turns to negative philosophy, which is the highest expression of subjective reason, even partly employs its dialectical reasoning, if only to expose how subjective reason claims to have attained the highest level of truth but, in fact, is “incapable of demonstrating it” (*HCM*, 145). Schelling earlier asserted that “this way of considering the matter,” by which he means the negativity of philosophy, “is adequately justified by the firm belief in a purely human reason, the conviction that all thinking and knowing are completely subjective and that nature is utterly without reason and thought” (*PEH*, 4). Schelling’s break into the unconventional philosophical syntax of the *Freedom* essay, beyond the *historical* syntax that sustains the negative (and subjectivist) understanding of history (the *written typology* of negative reason and knowledge), after somewhat exhausting the dialectic’s full semantic potential, magnifies into two complementary trajectories concerning the life of the spirit specific to a new form of expressibility that Schelling was advancing at the time.

THE *FREIHEITSSCHRIFT*’S CHALLENGE TO HISTORY AS THE TYPOLOGY OF FREEDOM

The *Freedom* essay challenges, as it were, the historical determinability of the negative sense of freedom, which encourages, on the one hand, a transgression of historical consciousness and, on the other hand, a critical reorientation of the understanding of the natural ground of freedom.

Firstly, the emphasis on radical historicity (the *Ages of the World* and its aborted trilogy of Past, Present, and Future) is intended to show how nature’s infinite but unconscious leverage on human cognition intrudes upon historical time or time-consciousness. Secondly, the inventive construction of nature is meant to unite freedom with natural history, reflecting a notion of freedom that does not negate the necessity of systems limiting its expressibility. As Steigerwald remarked in an old essay, this amounts to the question of “how to give nature life by demonstrating its construction without destroying its positive presence.”¹⁸ In the *Freiheitsschrift*, this refers to the problem of grounding the unity of freedom and

¹⁸ Joan Steigerwald, “Epistemologies of rupture: The problem of nature in Schelling’s philosophy,” in *Studies in Romanticism* 41, no. 4, 2002, p. 548; henceforth, *ER*.

necessity¹⁹ that the *Weltalter* sought to resolve in the historical trajectories of the ages of the world.

The *Weltalter* reflects the nascent beginning of the positive turn but under the predominance of negative philosophy, which, from the standpoint of the *Freedom* essay (serving as propaedeutic to the *Ages*), should reflect “the concept of the ideal part of philosophy with complete determinateness” (*ER*, 4). As Welchman and Norman argue in their now classic interpretation, the *Ages* supplements the *Freedom* essay’s “logical and ontological conundrums” with corresponding materialities, such as a “chronological dimension” coeval to the ideal speculations of free thought or freedom itself.²⁰ Even supposing, under the predominance of negative reason, the *Freedom* essay and the *Ages* are reduced to a kind of passive voyeurism, observing the ‘positive’ “[dissipate]” (*GPP*, 197), initially voided and excluded from knowledge by negative reason. But the same predominance of negativity in the *Freedom* essay and the *Ages* permits the understanding to capture what scatters and disintegrates, the content of knowledge ‘contorted’ by negative reason’s overindulgence in logical formalism, which is the task of the ‘positive’ to later ‘straighten’ out, and finally elevate to actual knowledge.

But knowledge could only gain awareness of this ‘enduring’ singularity, the positive, if it is already internally corrected. Schelling writes: “[o]nly the correctly understood negative philosophy leads to the positive philosophy; conversely, the positive philosophy is first possible only in contrast to the correctly understood negative” (*ibid.*, p. 145). In this general sense of the correctly understood negative, self-correction is possible only by a priori construction of nature. In the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling established the template for this kind of a priori construction echoing the self-correction of the negative: “To philosophise about nature means to heave it out of the dead mechanism to which it seems predisposed, to quicken it with freedom and to set it into its own free

¹⁹ Schelling argues: “According to an old but in no way forgotten legend, the concept of freedom is in fact said to be completely incompatible with system, and every philosophy making claim to unity and wholeness should end up with the denial of freedom. It is not easy to dispute general assurances of this kind; for who knows which limiting notions have already been linked to the word system, so that the claim asserts something which is of course very true, but also very trivial” (*PEH*, 8).

²⁰ Alistair Welchman and Judith Norman, “Creating the Past: Schelling’s *Ages of the World*,” 27. Welchman, A. and Norman, J. “Creating the past: Schelling’s *Ages of the World*,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 4, 2010, p. 27; henceforth, *SAW*.

development” (*FO*, 14).

Here the correctly understood negative corresponds to the second philosophical orientation of freedom (mentioned above in relation to Schelling’s break into unconventional syntax) in terms of the compatibility of freedom with a natural system. This time, it requires collapsing²¹ the negative (freedom) into that of the positive (nature), whose equivalent in negative knowledge, as correctly understood negativity that it is now, is freedom’s awareness that the positive is a necessity that *demand*s (that is to say, after freedom ‘set it into its own free development’ in line with the terms of construction of the *First Outline*). But also in this light, the demands made [on the negative] as “when the naturephilosopher puts himself in place of nature” (cf. *PNS*, 182), are themselves capable of producing, as Schelling underscores, a “new species equipped with new organs of thought” (*ibid.*) Accordingly, knowledge of the positive demands a transformed negative intelligence capable of novel forms of ‘putting oneself in place of nature,’ as Iain Hamilton Grant (2014) describes, the a priori construction of nature modelled on “nature’s hypothetical method of origination.”²² This self-inclusion in nature reflects a Spinozist unitary approach, where nature is both *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*. In his *Further Presentations*, Schelling emphasised that through this approach, the “one-in-all, and the all-in-one, enters science and through form comes to living cognition” (*FP*, 225). This science is the task of positive philosophy to demonstrate, which began with the *Ages of the World*.

²¹ Schelling earlier alluded to this concept of collapse as early as 1806, three years before the publication of the *Freedom* essay (1809). In the *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine* (1806), Schelling describes his project as follows: “We proceed therefore with the idea of the philosophy of nature not just beyond mere thinking to knowledge, but rather also beyond knowledge in general another step further, to the intuition /7, 32/ of reality and the complete collapse of the world known by us with the world of nature. Only at that point where the ideal has become real, the world of thought [has become] the world of nature, only at this point lies the last, the highest satisfaction and reconciliation of knowledge, as the fulfillment of the ethical requirements is only reached when they no longer appear to us as thoughts, for example, as commandments, but rather have become realities in the nature of our soul” (p. 3). See F.W.J. Schelling, *Statement on the True Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to the Revised Fichtean Doctrine*, trans. Dale E. Snow, New York: State University of New York Press, 2018/1806.

²² Iain Hamilton Grant, “The hypothesis of nature’s logic in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*,” in *Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism*, ed. M. Altman, pp. 478-498, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 494.

THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE POSITIVE

At this point, we should emphasise the critical importance of the *Weltalter* in terms of providing the understanding with a hypothetical concept of nature's origination (as Grant summarised above). Firstly, to comprehend nature's movement in history, beginning with the "empirical domain of mythology,"²³ and secondly, to expand the concept of historical experience based on transforming historical ideas about time-consciousness, including experiences mediated by existing knowledge. As Edward Allen Beach puts it: "[Schelling's] conception of the 'empirical' is not limited to the data of sensation, but also includes the possibility of encountering the supersensible [*das Übersinnliche*]," and thus, includes "a component of 'metaphysical empiricism' ... grounded in the principle of self-consciousness itself" (*PG*, 47). In line with Kant's first *Critique*, this refers to the transcendental ground of logic that makes synthetic a priori knowledge possible.

In the positive turn, nature's self-origination challenges the whole idea of historical presentation utilising logical and epistemic mediations in terms of the question, "how is logic itself made possible?" (*SAW*, 25). The method of empirical supplementation of nature's origination echoes the proto-transcendental schema of the *Weltalter*. In short, the *Ages* reflects the metaphysical empiricism of the broader questions of time-consciousness, a philosophy of history engaging the Hegelian conception of history that depends on logical mediation and dialectical sublation to comprehend what is otherwise merely a negative ground. In many ways, Hegel's dialectic reflects Kant's warning concerning the extent to which reason can and cannot proceed. Unlike Kant, however, Hegel's approach towards the ground, a purely negative past, regards the unknowable as necessarily determinable, thus interpreting the past as indeterminate and, therefore, open to mediation. Consequently, the past attains determinability in the linear progression of time-consciousness, which is supposed to attain consummate cognizability in the dialectical concept of history. Nonetheless, as Schelling argues as follows, it is simply impossible to sublimate the past:

It is a founding principle and rule of science (though few know it) that what is posited once is posited forever and cannot be sublated again,

²³ Edward Allen Beach, *Potencies of God(s): Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 148; henceforth, *PG*.

since otherwise it might just as well not have been posited at all ... True progress, which is equivalent to an elevation, only takes place when something is posited permanently and immutably, and becomes the ground of elevation and progression. (*ibid.*, p. 38; trans. Welchman and Norman)

Schelling's criticism of the logical sublation of the natural ground reveals his peculiar scientific approach, for instance, toward physical (unconscious) processes occurring before the "organic laws of the structure of the universe" could be conceptually deduced (which is impossible to achieve using the semantic construction of negative knowledge). In general, the unconscious necessitates the question, how can reason account for "the orgasm of forces" through which a particular "attracting force ... trembles for its existence and fears ... chaos?" (*PR*, 90). The transition from chaos, before time, to the actual beginning of historical time is characterised by an enigma, the unprethinkability of the origin (*GPP*, 86) that *Naturphilosophie* hypothesises, but not without the empirical supplementation of a priori construction of nature, that is to say, the "empirical construction of matter" (*FO*, 24). As Schelling extends the formulation of *Naturphilosophie* (modelled after the aesthetic) and the method of intuitive construction to the *Weltalter*,²⁴ the proper approach to nature, announced in the *Freiheitschrift*, must, therefore, proceed by deduction such as accounting for the actual "arousal of the irrational and dark principle in creatures" (*PEH*, 43).

What Schelling uncovers of the dialectical logic is the logical pretext of sublation itself. The *Weltalter* already demonstrates that the logical understanding of historical time depends on a proto-transcendental possibility, exceeding the dialectic's capacity for representation. The transcendental is the possibility of the logical schema that conditions experience itself. Surprisingly, this sounds a bit Kantian. However, for Schelling, the 'transcendental' is not limited to epistemic regulations typical of Kant's approach. In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, this concept is defined in terms of its capability to annex 'the material to the formal,'

²⁴ For instance, in *FO*, Schelling argues: "Since our science takes off from an unconditioned empiricism as principle, one can by no means speak of a transcendental construction, but solely of an *empirical construction of matter*. *How is matter in general originally produced?*" (24).

and vice-versa, to ‘materialise the laws of the mind into laws of nature’,²⁵ which echoes Schelling’s earlier formulation in his *Naturphilosophie* (*IPN*, 42-43). Foundationally, the materialisation of the mind’s a priori laws first occurred in the mythical elevation of the natural ground. Mythology was the first to temporalise the non-logical condition of history through the first a priori glimpse of nature. Broadly construed, this suggests a general idea of geophilosophy, as Tillotama Rajan argues, in the sense that the *Ages* addresses the question of the beginning through a “retreat of the origin in geology.”²⁶ Geology is the sublime material of mythological consciousness, the “unconscious alphabet of the spirit” (*PE*, 7). As unconscious, this alphabet, however, can never be sublated in consciousness.

Hegel may have successfully sublated the natural or the non-logical into the logical and the dialectical reflective of how in the grander scheme of things “mythology was overcome by modernity (*WA*, 106). In a provocative statement, Schelling alluded to the success of modernity in terms of the emergence of “a people who are nothing but images, just dreams of shadows” (*ibid.*). One cannot help but refer to this overturning by the success of logical representation and analytic tools of modern humanity alongside the technicalisation of thinking/consciousness in terms of the reproduction of this people. As Schelling adds, “[t]his is a people that ... arrived at the dissolution of everything in itself into thoughts” (*ibid.*), in place of ancient peoples who spoke the ‘unconscious alphabet of the spirit’. In other words, there are no real people in the dialectic.

THE NEVER-EXISTENCE OF GOD AS A FOIL TO SUBLATION

Schelling’s rejection of the Hegelian sublation brings to light his central emphasis on the metaphysical and ontological purchase of the problem of God’s existence. In comparison to Hegel’s notion of the Absolute, the highest concept of which, in “the history of the discovery of thoughts about the Absolute that is their object” (*SL*, 14), is none other than God, Schelling proclaims, “God never *exists*.” (*STI*, 211). Schelling writes:

²⁵ F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, trans. Peter Heath, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001a/1800, p. 14; henceforth, *STI*.

²⁶ Tillotama Rajan, “Philosophy as Encyclopedia: Hegel, Schelling and the organization of knowledge,” in *The Wordsworth Circle* 35, no. 1, 2004, p. 7; henceforth, *PE*.

History as a whole is a progressive, gradually self-disclosing revelation of the Absolute. Hence one can never point out in history the particular places where the mark of providence, or God Himself, is, as it were, visible. For God never *exists*, if the existent *is* that which presents itself in the objective world; if *He existed* thus, then *we* should not; but he continually *reveals* Himself. Man, through his history, provides a continuous demonstration of God's presence, a demonstration, however, which only the whole of history can render complete. Everything depends upon these alternatives being understood. (*ibid.*)

Suppose God exists. Historical knowledge will then have to wait out an infinite time for the entire revelation to complete. Schelling offered two approaches: 1) on account of infinity, historical knowledge 'cannot proceed from the concept of God to prove its existence,' for the simple reason that one concept alone would require an infinite time to develop, but, and this brings us to, 2) thought "can proceed from the concept of that which indubitably exists and conversely prove the divinity of that which indubitably exists" (*GPP*, 201).

On the one hand, knowledge cannot proceed from the concept of God to prove its existence, indicative of the constitutive limit of concepts vis-à-vis infinity whose origin is characteristic of 'primordial time's condition of possibility in darkness and closure.' Schelling argues in *The Ages of the World*:

Darkness and closure are characteristic of primordial time. The farther we go back into the past, the more powerful the contraction. This is the way it is with the mountains of the primordial world and this is the way it also is with the oldest formations of the human spirit. (*WA*, 83)

On the other hand, the negative concept of the Absolute is temporalised, which first occurred in the pre-philosophical intimations of the myths and the religions of the ages, culminating in the Hegelian *Geist*. In this light, Schelling offered a series of reflections corresponding to different stages of negativity's critical conception of itself: **a)** the *Freedom* essay, grounding the principle of negativity in the radical contingency of freedom; **b)** *The Ages of the World*, introducing the temporal background of dialectical logic, and, **c)** his later

reflections on mythology and revelation, providing a glimpse of negativity's historical trajectories *qua* self-correction processes starting with pre-philosophical history.

Schelling describes these self-corrective strategies as the equivalent of philosophy's approach to the fundamentally religious nature of its claims but "will nonetheless refuse to call itself, or allowed itself to be called, *religious* philosophy" (*GPP*, 183). In the Berlin lectures of *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, Schelling attributes this religious awareness to the emergence of the "philosophy of revelation ... a 'revealed philosophy' [*Offenbarungsphilosophie*]," in which, as an object of study, "revelation is proposed ... not as a source or authority" (*ibid.*, p. 187). Rather, as an *object* of study, revelation is understood as the a priori content of negativity that it cannot elevate to actual knowledge. In contrast, by progressive elevation, it gains knowledge by self-correcting truth, no longer the idealist resolution of proceeding "toward thought" but rather "out from thought" (*ibid.*, p. 209).

Arguably, the Hegelian dialectic reflects this kind of idealism that arrives at the spirit's life by "progressively liberating itself from that which is contingent, so that in a necessary progression it arrives at its enduring content" (*ibid.*). Hegel's idealism thus treats the content as something external to thought and must be understood through concepts. The problem of externality is resolved by the conceptual seizure of the outside (albeit within an immanent universe/order). But the moment this idealism reaches an understanding of the content according to its transition from immediate or contingent to necessary, "the content remains stuck in the mere idea" (*ibid.*). Here the immanent becomes a lonely crowd. It can no longer make the concept into substance/content of reason. This leads to an absurd condition where nothing is left to be known, resulting into two strands of dogmatism, either the pure subjectivism of speculation (subjective realism or objective idealism) or the dogmatism of the belief in unrestrained externality (subjective idealism or objective realism).²⁷

On the one hand, the subject falls under the allure of desire; on the other hand, humans become passive recipients of absolute truth, such as the ideas of

²⁷ F.W.J. Schelling, "Philosophical Letters on Criticism and Dogmatism," in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays*, trans. Fritz Marti, 156-218, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1980, p. 169.

revelation without contents, without corresponding materialities. For Schelling, the correct approach would be to posit a nonconceptual being (such as God) “in order to transform it into the immanent” (*ibid.*). This is how mythology begins. The immanent, which resolves the separateness of subjectivism and objectivism, is the actual object of thought whereby thought transforms into a living cognition, into an actual history (of thought). To the extent that the historical schema of nature elevates God into history (*PNS*, 47), mythology necessarily becomes the object of historical investigation. God is no longer a possibility but an actual living cognition, which reflects nature’s origination in an immanent universe through “the appearance of the mind in nature with human form” (*ER*, 554). Meanwhile, in the human world, a parallel unfolding of nature within consciousness starts to complement the re-origination of consciousness in history and vice-versa.

SPIRIT’S RECONSTRUCTION FROM FREEDOM TO GOD

The parallelism mentioned above, however, only works if there is a permanent unsublated ground that the dialectic cannot reduce to logical mediation. In proportion to the thinkability of the movements of reason in history, nature evolves in and out of its essence as unprethinkable, hence, enabling the parallel movements. As Schelling asserts, because “thought is only concerned with possibility and potency,” just as dialectical thought apprehends the activities of reason in logical terms, “where these are excluded, thought has no authority” (*GPP*, 202). At this point, thought “pulls itself entirely back within the limits of the negative” (*ibid.*, p. 148) and, therefore, stands motionless before the unsublated. Unfortunately, this is the point at which philosophy reaches a stalemate.

Schelling, however, settles the impasse by positing the parallelism that only a correctly understood negative can be able to sustain. Echoing Spinoza, it is sustained in the parallelism of History (as *Geist*) and God. In a nutshell, this is the crucial residual Spinozism of Schelling.

On the one hand, it is sustained by the *Spirit*, where being has attained its highest truth in the unity of consciousness and historical temporality, i.e., in the *Idea* (as the expression of the Absolute). On the other hand, it is sustained by *God*,

which is the “true God”²⁸ since He reveals Himself, thus reveals his existence as Being, and must only be, in ‘knowledge.’ This is also the point at which God is sustained as the name or object of the “history of the discovery of thoughts about the Absolute” (*SL*, 14). Heidegger, in his seminar on Schelling, captures this intriguing process that Schelling has completed in behalf of negative philosophy: “Philosophy is *Ontotheology*. The more originally it is both in one, the more truly it is philosophy.”²⁹

One can, therefore, look at Schelling’s examination of the stages of the unfolding of negativity as reconstructive attempts of a correctly understood negative parallel to the dialectical progress of history that Hegel’s system has set in motion.³⁰ In this respect, the *Freiheitschrift*, the *Weltalter*, and Schelling’s preoccupation with myths and revelation are speculative stages congruent to the dialectical realisation of history. The *Freedom* essay initially manifests this progress by citing freedom, already implicit in Kant, as the “positive concept of the in-itself” (*PEH*, 22). For its part, the *Weltalter* prepares negative philosophy to proceed to the next step, to identify this ‘in-itself’ within the movement of time-consciousness, the realm of ‘potencies,’ apropos the proto-transcendental possibility of historical experience. But as earlier as the “Presentation of My System of Philosophy,” Schelling already prefigured the *Ages*’ emphasis on the “original equivalence” or ‘equipollence’ of beings (*WA*, 9). In the *realm of potencies*, in contradistinction to the realm of the understanding (that posits propositions such as A and B), both A and B, which are opposed tendencies, are held to be the same (*PMS*, 160). Similarly, “both are x,” where x means the *undifferentiated* that the negative determination of potency in propositional form can never

²⁸ Schelling (2007a/1842) argues in Lecture Eight of his *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*: “The true God, God as such, only can be in knowledge, and in complete contrast with a well-known word little reflected upon, but in agreement with the words of Christ, we must say: God who would not be known would be no God” (*HPM*, 123). See F.W.J. Schelling, *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, trans. M. Richey and M. Zisselsberger, New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.

²⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, Athens, Ohio, London: Ohio University Press, 1985, p. 51.

³⁰ As his translators (*cf* Richey and Zisselsberger 2007a, xxi) note, “there is visible a Hegelian dimension to the Schellingian comprehension of mythology; nowhere is this more manifest than in the fact that in these lectures mythology in part functions in conjunction with a developing odyssey – a phenomenology ... of human religious consciousness” (in *HPM*, xxi).

sublate. As Schelling argues, “[r]ather, there is only an identity of the being, of the link (of the copula),” in that “[t]o assert this would mean sublimating human comprehension, the possibility of expressing oneself, even the contradiction itself,” such as, “the same = x is both Yes and No, Love and Wrath, Leniency and Strictness” (*WA*, 8).

One can say that the in-itself is this X, the ‘positive unsublated x’ that Kant described as the unfathomable = the mathematical x. The equation leads to the *Freiheitschrift*’s emphasis on the ‘in-itself’ as the ‘positive concept of freedom’ (*PEH*, 22). It is the task of positive philosophy to show, however, “the specific difference [*Differenz*]” that this concept illustrates, i.e., the “distinctiveness of human freedom” (*ibid.*) already presupposed in the ‘in-itself’ (as positive). Unfortunately, philosophy is incapable of manifesting this ‘distinctiveness,’ relying instead on the analytic and synthetic tools of rational “comprehension” and “representation” into which, as Schelling spells out, “the discomfoting” and the “incomprehensible” were to be resolved (*WA*, 7). The *Ages* is precisely designed to expose the limitations of *this* ‘idealism,’ an idealism that resolves everything to sublation, representations, and generalities. Hence, idealism is unable to exhibit the distinctiveness that grounds the essence of freedom.

As a parallel movement of the progress of the Spirit, the *Ages* then strains the dialectic to betray its determinate exclusion of the positive (the in-itself) via a rapturous insight into the unsublated. In the separate 1811 and 1813 drafts of the *Weltalter*, Schelling stressed the intrinsic paradox of historical time, which requires an “internal rupture,” say, between ‘being and being present,’ for the past (and the future) to enter our perceptual realm, which always begins with “[positing] something of ourselves as past.”³¹ The rupture indicates that a permanent trauma characterises historical existence or the experience of rupture that is both intrinsic and coeval to time and the experience of time. Lastly, Schelling identifies the origin of this trauma in the natural unsublated precondition of existence, which he describes as the primordial “auto-destructive frenzy [that lies] at the core of all things” (*ibid.*).³²

Meanwhile, it is essential to underscore at this point that Schelling’s positive

³¹ Katie Hay, “The Role of Narration and the Overcoming of the Past in Schelling’s *Ages of the World*,” *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 8, no. 3, 2016, p. 282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17570638.2016.1231877>.

³² Quoted by Hay (2016) from the 1946 edition of the 1811 and 1813 fragments of the *Ages*.

turn is inconceivable without its basis in the natural ground, which explains the role of *Naturphilosophie* in determining the historical unfolding of the positive. In its most objective condition, consciousness is none other than a God-positing consciousness, provided that “it is in general that which posits God naturally (*natura sua*)” (*HPM*, 138). By means of its self-origination, nature obliges philosophical work to return to her fold “through a process,” in virtue of which nature “[appears] as that which again posits God only *mediately* (indeed, precisely through a process)” (*ibid.*). This process has acquired a human form through the logical mediations of knowledge. In Schelling’s lecture on *Historical-Critical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology*, the final trajectory of the reconstruction of absolute history in and through the human form of mediation which expresses history as a process or the unfolding of the realisation of freedom comes to full relief. As it were, consciousness “cannot help but appear as just the consciousness that produces God” (*ibid.*).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this context, Schelling’s nature-based formulations found in the *Freiheitsschrift*, the *Weltalter*, and later speculations on mythology and revelation serve as critical vectors of the *movement* of positive philosophy in the sense that this God-producing consciousness exhibits the development of knowledge as the self-correction of the negative. The self-correction manifests in temporal, geological and historical terms, vis-à-vis Hegel’s *Logic*.³³ Schelling described this movement as *Wissenschaft*, the history of science, in which the learner gains not so much from what knowledge has so far accomplished but from realising “how, from stage to stage until now, the highest goal has not been achieved” (*HPM*, p. 41). Insofar as these vectors of scientific progress of reason function as critical stages of the presentation of correct negativity, according to how, in each of these stages, the positive is posited in a transparently negative way, these self-correcting paths undermine the general pretention of negative philosophy, for instance, that it has unlocked the Absolute through the most exhaustive encyclopedic stages of the historical progress of reason. (The ‘encyclopedic’ refers to the universal knowledge obtained out of Hegel’s sublation of history into the Absolute Spirit

³³ F.W.J. Schelling, *On the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. Andrew Bowie, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 157.

which represents general negativity). Nonetheless, this undermining does not abolish negativity since the positive can be posited only from the negative's standpoint.

In Schelling, this is guaranteed by the philosophy of nature (first announced in the *Ideas* [1797]) that initiates and completes the process of negativity's critical conception of itself. As Sean McGrath reiterates in his recent publication on the late philosophy of Schelling,

What bounded nature-philosophy in 1797 was the necessity of a parallel account that takes as its point of departure transcendental subjectivity, reflectively available to itself, and irreducible to the material conditions of its existence, but mirroring in all essentials the results of nature-philosophy.³⁴

Accordingly, this establishes *Naturphilosophie* as the overall guiding principle of positive philosophy, arguably, the only principle Schelling consistently ventured to elaborate facing up to the opponents of nature philosophy from Fichte, to Eschenmayer (*PNS*, 202),³⁵ and Hegel as well. To this end, Schelling sums up the project of *Naturphilosophie*, which consistently frames the philosophical arc of his early and later texts:

Nature should be Mind made visible, Mind invisible Nature. Here then, in the absolute identity of Mind *in us* and Nature *outside us*, the problem of a possibility of Nature external to us must be resolved. The final goal of our further research is, therefore, this idea of Nature. (*IPN*, 42)

The idea of nature, however, requires the establishment of the asymmetrical relation that, according to the hypothetical origination of nature, as we learned from Grant, through the Schellingian empirical construction of matter, demands a formulation of an idea of 'Identity'. Schelling refers to this identity as the idea of how matter is 'originally produced', which can only first materialise a priori, that is, in consciousness (hence, the task of transcendental philosophy to shore up its intuitions with their appropriate contents – in the unfolding of the in-itself/in-themselves of nature as freedom/s). Already in the *Freiheitsschrift*, the *Darstellung* (presentation) of this positive identity challenges the standpoint of transcendental

³⁴ Sean J. McGrath, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Late Schelling: The Turn to the Positive*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021, p. 49.

³⁵ In Grant's account, the target of Karl August Eschenmayer's critique of Schelling is the question of the "transformation of ethics into physics" (*ibid.*).

philosophy that commences with the ideal. Schelling treats consciousness as, indeed, in possession of the capacity for a priori construction utilising the acts of the intellect, but only in the present time. This means that construction by consciousness is freedom motioning a projecting toward in the sense that it “casts its light ahead only, and not behind” (*STI*, 18). In principle, it cannot, through the time systems (or histories) according to which freedom naturalises its time, “recover anything” (*PNS*, 1771).

Thus, the ‘presentation’ (*Darstellung*) of Schelling’s early essays, from the real to ideal,³⁶ already hint at an ‘indivisible remainder’ (that he would later formulate in the *Freiheitschrift*), which would finally commit positive philosophy to the task of “[bringing its] content to knowledge” (*GPP*, 187). Schelling writes: “[R]eason possesses nothing *on its own account*, it only watches as its content *dissipates [entwerden]*” (*ibid.*). The apriori construction of what is already dissipating or disintegrating, however, can be approached via aesthetic reconstruction (outlined in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*) through reflecting upon what is “directed immediately inwards” (*STI*, 14). We can situate this inward direction within the context of identifying the location or *topos* of the dissipation of the self (the self becomes increasingly unsupported by a ‘ground’) that has already ‘expanded to infinity’ (*IPP*, 99), leaving it with a purely formal category of freedom.

We have to concede, though, with Hegel when he puts it that there is a logical possibility to recover the ‘whole’, in the guise of the singularity of the Subject (described in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* as somewhat analogous to Substance) referring to the same concept of identity but expressed as a logical proposition: “The concrete identity of the concept that was the *result* of the disjunctive judgment and constitutes the *inner* foundation of the judgment of the concept – the identity that was posited at first only in the predicate – is thus recovered *in the whole*” (*SL*, 586).

Even in Hegel’s system, this logical expressibility presupposes the foundational organisation of the ‘idea’ in Nature in which “universality is manifested” but

³⁶ “It follows from this (natural) arrangement of cause and effect that here, while the *causa* (God) a posteriori or *per posterius* is proved or demonstrated, the conclusion (the world) is deduced or comprehended a priori” (*GPP*, 181).

“only negatively” to the extent that “subjectivity is sublated in it.”³⁷ What was already found in Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, speaking of the original ‘diremption’ (FO, 205) that marks off the organism or individual from nature, which, paradoxically, constitutes their unity as “identity in duplicity” (*ibid.*, p. 180), in Hegel this ‘separation’ involves the process of singularising itself (on the part of the organism) from the ‘vitality’ of nature. Hegel means the ideal progress of recovering nature’s logical beginning owing to the intrinsic flaw of vitality whose desire to make itself into the universal hastens its death – “it is in this universality that the vitality itself dies; for since vitality is a process, opposition is necessary to it, and now the other which it should have had to overcome is for it no longer an other” (HPN, 441). For Hegel, this separation must progressively culminate in “an ethical system, and finally into a religion that recaptures the simplicity of the original idea” (di Giovanni in SL, xvi). Hegel summarises his point in his lectures on the *Philosophy of Nature*:

The form in which this separation is accomplished is, precisely, the consummation of the singular, which converts itself into the universal but cannot endure this universality. In life, the animal maintains itself, it is true, against its non-organic nature and its genus; but its genus, as the universal, in the end retains the upper hand. The living being, as a singular, dies from the habit of life, in that it lives itself into its body, into its reality. (HPN, 442)

Still, for Hegel, this separation merely constitutes what he otherwise described, without mincing words, the “*death of natural being*” (*ibid.*) This death has to be compensated *spiritually* to the extent that the Spirit is the “last *self-externality* of Nature” and, thus, has “passed over into its truth” (*ibid.*, p. 443). The death of the natural being paves the way to “ethical, substantial nature” (*ibid.*, p. 338). By contrast, Schelling does not accord the ethical organism the capacity to sublimate nature’s self-externality and rejects the dialectical principle that nature’s “existence is a relativity, and so, as a negative, its being is only posited, derivative” (*ibid.*, p. 444). Thus, Schelling’s positive philosophy at the outset preempts the logical pretence of the dialectic,³⁸ that is, to “find in [nature’s] externality only a

³⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature. Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences 1830*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 441; henceforth, HPN.

³⁸ As G. Anthony Bruno argues, “It is beside the point to observe that Hegel’s logic is coherent, for its coherence raises the question of its value. It is equally irrelevant to observe that merely deciding to take up the *Logic* does not determine its structure, for the issue is not what reason’s logical structure is, but that it

mirror of ourselves” (*ibid.*, 445) but ‘ourselves’ as the negativity implicit in the death of natural beings, the “free reflex of spirit” (*ibid.*). To succeed in this goal of preventing the logical pretence of the dialectic to take its course without supervision, Schelling, however, gives the dialectic what is due it:

[T]he negative triumphs as the science in which thought, after it has liberated itself from its immediate, that is, accidental content, first really attains its goal whereby its necessary content becomes dominant, and upon which thought now looks on in freedom ... Therefore ... to the extent it is *philosophy*, the negative is itself positive since it posits the latter outside itself, and, thus, there is *no longer* a duality. From the very beginning our earliest aspirations have sought a positive philosophy. (*GPP*, 197)

The triumph of negativity is acknowledged by positive philosophy in the sense that it sees in negativity the work of self-awareness, its ethical autonomy that finally recognises in nature the “necessary content of freedom” (*ibid.*). But it is not simply this acknowledgement of negativity by the positive embodiment of the in-itself, *freedom*, that is already in the negative to begin with, that the negative “becomes certain of its status” (*ibid.*, 198). Without a deeper realisation that it is groundless *sans* the positive, negativity will continually be under pressure, for instance, to produce an actual God, “not the mere idea of God” (*ibid.*, 197), or, as Hegel himself put it, “not in the contemplation of him as spirit, but ... his immediate existence” (*HPN*, 445). Hegel’s sublation of nature out of which the Spirit arises is, therefore, only conceivable on the assumption that the ‘reflex of the spirit’, or the realisation of the autonomy of freedom, is “put in the position to remain with and equal to [the positive]” (*GPP*, 198). This is the whole kernel of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* that Hegel simply put to motion, but only half of it – “to bring forth realism out of idealism, *in that it materialises the laws of mind into laws of nature*” (*STI*, 14). As Schelling announced in his Berlin lectures, the other half is responding to the *demand* of the positive, that is, to bring philosophy in service of *life*.

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is—not its concept, but its existence” (202). See G. Anthony Bruno, “The Facticity of Time: Conceiving Schelling’s Idealism of Ages,” in *Schelling’s Philosophy: Freedom, Nature and Systematicity*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 185-206.

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