



Indifference and the World: Schelling's Pantheism of Bliss

Kirill Chepurin^{1,2} 

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Abstract

Although largely neglected in Schelling scholarship, the concept of bliss (*Seligkeit*) assumes central importance throughout Schelling's oeuvre. Focusing on his 1810–11 texts, the *Stuttgart Seminars* and the beginning of the *Ages of the World*, this paper traces the logic of bliss, in its connection with other key concepts such as indifference, the world or the system, at a crucial point in Schelling's thinking. Bliss is shown, at once, to mark the zero point of the developmental narrative that Schelling constructs here (from God before creation, via the natural, historical, and spiritual world, to the fully actualized, 'true pantheism') and to interrupt it at every step. As a result, bliss emerges here in its real utopian force but also its all-too-real ambivalence, indifference, and even violence, despite Schelling's best efforts to theorize it as 'love'; and Schelling himself emerges, in these texts, as one of modernity's foremost thinkers not just of nature or freedom, but also of bliss in its modern afterlives. At stake in Schelling's conception of bliss, I argue, is the very relationship between history and eternity, the not-yet and the already-here, the present, and the eschatological—as well as between Spinozian immanence and the Christian temporality of salvation, so important for modernity (with what is often called its process of 'secularization')—not to mention the complex entanglement of indifference, violence, and love or the ideas of totality, nonproductivity, and nonrelation that Schellingian bliss involves.

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✉ Kirill Chepurin
kchepurin@hse.ru; kirill.chepurin@gmail.com

¹ School of Philosophy, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russian Federation

² Theologische Fakultät, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

The soul that has been driven by love into God, the soul consumed as into fire, dissolved as if into water – such a soul has no intact intellect of the ordinary human kind with which to construe dialectical relationships.

Anne Carson, *Decreation*

In a section of *Minima Moralia* entitled, in an homage to Maupassant, *Sur l'eau* ('Afloat'), Theodor Adorno imagines a utopia of nonproductivity—and in what follows I will proceed to modify Adorno's formulations slightly. Perhaps, he muses there, the most radical way to envision an emancipated society, a 'society rid of its fetters,' even 'the true society,' is to conceive of it not as a world of perfect or accelerated productivity, or unbridled dynamism, but as completely disinvested from the logic of production—as refusing the pursuit of incessant creativity, 'uninterrupted procreation,' and ever-more-efficient activity—a pursuit that masquerades, ideologically, as the very nature of the world. The dynamic process and the demand of dynamism itself are caught up in the relational net of use, accumulation, and development. 'Perhaps,' Adorno speculates, 'the true society will grow tired of development and, out of freedom, leave possibilities unused.' 'Tiredness' implies here, I would say, a certain indifference to, and exhaustion from and of, the allure of the world's possibilities, with their constant not-yet that only serves de facto to reproduce and naturalize the world as it is. This No or Enough to the logic of productivity is grasped by Adorno as a kind of natural logic, too, but in a very different way: as the calm of the sea and the serenity of the sky, a nature that immanently refuses to evolve (any more). '*Rien faire comme une bête*, lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky ... might take the place of process, act, satisfaction.'

¹

In this near-Rousseauistic gesture—which may, in fact, have been directly inspired by a similar image in Rousseau's *Reveries*²—nature's (and not just society's) re-production is aborted, too. Nature is turned thereby into a figure of blissful indifference, in which the world is simply resolved into or dissolved by the No—full stop—so that the 'good place' of this utopia is dissolved like in water, too, coinciding with the dissolution itself. No wonder that it is the ocean and the sky, these two primordial principles of the world that accomplish this suspension. In Adorno's image, ocean, animal, human, and planetary life are all brought together into a new identity, leaving the logic of possibility and productivity behind, without a care in or for the world. At the same time, what 'tiredness' also indicates here is that this bliss is very far from the kind that we might imagine as paradisaic: it is already premised on a process of development, an exhaustion from possibility, and the labor and cruelty of the negative, while also carrying with itself its own, different kind of cruelty or insensitivity—that of an absolute indifference to the world as it is, which, in bliss, gets suspended, essentially resolved, together with whatever further possibilities it might have contained. If this bliss is, as Adorno suggests, pure peace; or, as Schelling asserts, pure love, then it is an uncaring peace and an unkind love at best.

In this, although I started with Adorno, by way of transforming his terminology and stripping his argument of some of its Hegelian-dialectical edge, I have arrived—if only in a first approximation—at Schelling and, as I will suggest in this paper, the logic of bliss (*Seligkeit*) and even 'absolute bliss' in the 1810 *Stuttgart Seminars* and the 1811

¹ Adorno 2005, 155–157.

² Rousseau 1992, 66: "I would slip away and go throw myself into a boat that I rowed to the middle of the lake when the water was calm; and there, stretching myself out full-length in the boat, my eyes turned to heaven, I let myself slowly drift back and forth with the water..." I am grateful to Joseph Albernaz for this reference.

Weltalter (*Ages of the World*; an unfinished project—but it is precisely its beginning that will interest me here). The concept of bliss has been neglected in Schelling scholarship, but it is central for him in these and other texts. In fact, a fascination with *Seligkeit*, a term he uses to reconfigure Spinoza's *beatitudo* and the Christian salvific logic—a term that can also be translated as 'blessedness' and even 'salvation'³—runs throughout Schelling's oeuvre starting at least from the 1795 *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism* and all the way until Schelling's later positive and negative philosophy.⁴ But although, true to the nonprocessual nature of bliss, this concept remains surprisingly stable across the changes in Schelling's underlying metaphysics, for this paper I have chosen to focus on his 1810–1811 texts. I will here reconstruct the logic(s) of these texts through the lens of *Seligkeit* and bring out what I regard as the philosophical significance and repercussions of this concept for Schelling's overall system-narrative. In this, my goal is not only reconstructive, but also hermeneutic and speculative. It is during this period, I believe—at this halfway point in Schelling's thinking—that we can best see bliss emerge in its real utopian force, but also in its conflict with the finite world of nature and human history, as well as its all-too-real ambivalence, indifference, and even violence, despite Schelling's best efforts to theorize it as 'love'; so that Schelling himself emerges, as a result, as one of modernity's foremost thinkers not just of nature or freedom, but also of bliss in its modern afterlives. It is, after all, as we will observe, the very relationship between history and eternity, the not-yet and the already-here, the present and the eschatological—as well as Spinozian immanence and the Christian temporality of salvation, so important for modernity (with what is often called its process of 'secularization')⁵—that is at stake in Schellingian bliss, not to mention the complex entanglement of indifference, violence, and love or the ideas of totality and nonrelation that it involves.

In all of Schelling's texts, as far as I could determine, bliss retains its Spinozian—and ultimately Epicurean and Stoic—roots by indicating (to quote Leo Strauss on

³ It is also, of course, an important medieval mystical term, closely related to *Wonne* (best translated as "joy")—and Schelling does sometimes speak of *Wonne* alongside *Seligkeit*. I have chosen to translate *Seligkeit* as "bliss," although it could also be translated as "beatitudo" or "blessedness." Ultimately, all these translations are valid, but my reasons for opting for "bliss" are threefold. First, originally in 1795 Schelling introduces "bliss" in contrast to (and in the context of his discussion of) happiness—precisely as the higher, nonempirical, pure happiness—and I prefer this more general meaning to the more narrowly religious connotations of "blessedness" and "beatitudo" (which it, importantly, does not exclude). Relatedly, in the context of modernity, this term seems philosophically more relevant than the other two. Finally, "bliss" is a key Romantic term (in British Romanticism in particular)—also in the sense of a higher happiness—and this connection between Schelling and Romanticism is one I wanted to maintain, even if I do not focus on it explicitly here.

⁴ It is the 1795 *Philosophical Letters* that establish the concept of bliss as the complete "annihilation" (*Vernichtung*) of the finite world and the latter's structure of conflict (*Widerstreit*) and striving. See Schelling 1982, 91–99. Already in *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, however, written earlier in 1795, Schelling speaks of "pure happiness" (Schelling 1980, 123–125, 173–175)—contrasted by him with empirical happiness and configured as the complete cessation of all oppositions that define finitude (including the subject-object opposition, but also that between happiness and morality)—which paves the way for the *Letters*' introduction of the term "bliss." For the late Schelling's central discussions of bliss, see, e.g., his *Groundwork of Positive Philosophy* (Schelling 1972, esp. 335–336) and the concluding lecture of the *Philosophical Introduction to the Philosophy of Mythology, or Presentation of the Purely Rational Philosophy* (Schelling 1856, 553–572).

⁵ On the contemporary theoretical significance of the opposition between immanence and the Christian as well as secular discourses of futurity and the world, see generally the work of Daniel Colucciello Barber—in particular Barber 2016. For an important discussion of immanence vis-à-vis "the world" (of modernity) and the subject in the world, see Dubilet 2018, 1–7 and 173–178.

Spinoza's bliss) a 'stable condition complete in itself' that is, at the same time, a divine state of the soul (Strauss 1997, 210).⁶ As a standpoint of completion, bliss thus indexes a certain condition of totality, without an outside or, importantly, without relating to an outside. This is how, in the 1795 *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, Schelling distinguishes between bliss (*Seligkeit*) and happiness (*Glückseligkeit*): *Glückseligkeit*, says there Schelling, still has the component of *Glück*, 'luck,' as that which happens to us, or comes from the outside. It implies therefore a certain 'passivity' vis-à-vis 'the objective world,' whereas bliss, this 'absolute condition' of the soul in its nonrelation to any outside, indicates a state of independence and therefore perfect 'virtue' and 'morality' (Schelling 1982, 91)⁷—an explicitly Spinozian idea. Schelling even quotes Spinoza's 'Bliss is not the reward for virtue, but virtue itself' in the *Letters* (ibid.)—and later in the 1804 *Philosophy and Religion* (Schelling 2008, 45). In the so-called identity-philosophical texts from 1802 to 1804, Schelling speaks of bliss as an 'absolute unity' (Schelling 1859, 450); as one of God's two 'attributes' (alongside *Sittlichkeit*; Schelling 2008, 46); or as the highest intensification of the original unity of real and ideal in intellectual intuition, in which we intuit the life of God (Schelling 1860, 574 [§324]). In Schelling's account of bliss, two senses of 'indifference' are combined: indifference as unconcernedness (the standard sense of the English word, to which normally corresponds the German term *Gleichgültigkeit*) and indifference as what Schelling calls *Indifferenz* in contrast to *Differenz*, i.e., as the absence of difference, nondifference, or indistinction—an identity in which the opposing terms are simply and immediately collapsed or undifferentiated.⁸ We will observe the ramifications of indifference thus understood.

⁶ Cf. Alanen 2012, 252–3. Importantly, Spinoza was the originator of the thinking of bliss in (modern, post-Cartesian) philosophy. As Anthony Gottlieb elegantly puts it, "Descartes was beset by doubt; Spinoza was troubled by futility. Descartes wanted certainty, but Spinoza sought bliss." Gottlieb cites the famous opening lines of Spinoza's *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: "After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile... I resolved at last to find out whether there was ... something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity" (Gottlieb 2016, 108). The state of bliss—the culmination of the entire logic of totality in the later *Ethics*—is where this joy of eternity is acquired. That must have resonated with the young Schelling, too, who starting from his early works continuously circles around a similar set of concerns, even if the underlying metaphysics is, in Schelling's bliss, in many ways different from Spinoza's.

⁷ Throughout this paper, translations from Schelling are mine unless otherwise noted, although I have also consulted existing English translations where available.

⁸ *Gleichgültigkeit* denotes a state in which two opposing terms or emotions are "equally *gültig*," i.e., equally valid. It is important to note that Schelling himself explicitly connects the two senses of indifference (as *Gleichgültigkeit* and as *Indifferenz*) in his discussion of the primordial divine essence as "a state in which everything is still all-together without separation... [an] endless plenitude not just of the like but of the completely unlike in complete inseparation (*Ungeschiedenheit*). ... This is the state that we have called the indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) of potencies in God" (Schelling 2017, 94–95)—a state in which, as Schelling notes slightly before that, potencies "lie in God in full indifference (*Indifferenz*) or indistinguishability (*Ununterscheidbarkeit*)" (84). In this *Gleichgültigkeit*, nothing is thus singled out or preferred—to the point of not distinguishing between, or not caring to distinguish between, anything at all. Later Schelling again uses *Gleichgültigkeit* in the sense of at once indifference and indistinction: "We can conceive of these [opposed] principles [i.e., *love* and *egoism*], too, as being originally in God in a certain [state of] indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*), and yet, if they were to persist in this indifference, neither God nor anything else could develop" (108). In this state, God cannot or does not care to develop—or, for that matter, to differentiate between his own "love" and "egoism." Cf. also Schelling 1946, 130: "We have also considered this indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) elsewhere under the name of absolute indifference (*Indifferenz*), and designated it as the absolutely first."

As we will see, bliss indexes in Schelling's thinking at once the absolute beginning or zero point, which must be thought of as *preceding* (even the possibility of) the world—and the *end* goal of the system-narrative, in which the world completely dissolves.⁹ At the same time, in a move that further complicates the logic of bliss, bliss in the *Stuttgart Seminars* gets inscribed in a powerful way *into* the vast panorama of God's self-revelation and the world's natural and spiritual development in time, and ultimately beyond time, that Schelling here unfolds, re-appearing at crucial points of this development. Since the becoming-actual of God happens as a process, this introduces the moment of the 'not yet' as part of this logic—so that, at this moment of time and this point in the world history, the divine has *not yet* fully revealed itself, the development of nature has *not yet* been completed (so that nature, in its present state, still remains 'fallen' and 'impure'), the dead have *not yet* been resurrected, time has *not yet* united with eternity, and bliss has *not yet* arrived. This not-yet, too, will interact critically with the logic of bliss I will trace in this paper.

Zero/System

We will get to the not-yet in due time—let us consider totality first. Importantly, the *Stuttgart Seminars* begin and end with an absolute identity, or a certain logic of totality, bridged by Schelling's construction of divinity, nature, and the spirit world. Opening with a postulation of the 'system of the world'—which, however, 'can only be discovered as a system that is already there in-itself, namely in the divine understanding' (Schelling 2017, 68; hereafter *SPV*)—these seminars reconfigure Schelling's earlier presentations of his system by re-articulating the absolute's exhibition in terms of stages or 'periods' of a single process, which has furthermore a temporal and historical dimension, going from primordial eternity to time and then to their unity, which is again eternal. All this is, at the same time, a movement of 'potentiation'; Schelling continues in this work to present his system in the language of 'potencies' (that is, ascending or unfolding stages of the articulation of the real and the ideal in their interconnection), inscribed into the logic of eternity and temporality.

Among other things, Schelling considers here God's or the absolute's self-differentiation within itself, the creation and the Fall, the figure of Christ, the development of nature (from the inorganic to organic and then to human, recapitulating here a lot of his earlier *Naturphilosophie* and putting forward a tripartite anthropology), the character of world history, church and state, the problem of good and evil, the creation of angels, and the Fall of Lucifer, as well as the nature of the spirit world and the fate of human souls and bodies after death, all the way until the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the body, followed finally by a period of new absolute identity, in which all will again be eternally subordinated to God the Father and evil itself restored—a world of 'absolute bliss' and 'true (or fully actualized) pantheism' (*SPV* 182–187), if it may even be still called a world at this point. We begin with the zero potency (God before differentiation and creation) and end, ultimately, with the full *explicatio* and highest intensification of the zero.

⁹ This is, in fact, already the case in the 1795 *Philosophical Letters*. See Schelling 1982, 95 (on bliss as the state preceding the Fall) and 99 (on "absolute bliss" as "the final goal"). The system-narrative itself and the interaction between the logic of bliss and this narrative get, however, more complex in the middle Schelling.

As we can see, this is quite a system—merging pantheism and revelation, eternity and temporality, God, nature, and history, as well as this life, life after death, and future (eternal) life. But it is not just Schelling’s incorporation of sacred and profane history into, and their identification with, at once, the logic of creation, revelation, ‘God’s becoming-conscious’ (*SPV* 94), and the natural history of the world, that makes this system so ambitious and, if you will, so strange, even by German idealist standards. The absolute identity with which the *Stuttgart Seminars* begin—the zero potency I have mentioned—is already of a very odd, unproductive kind. Before Schelling can proceed to explicate the logic of the world, and even before the absolute or God can differentiate himself, or be thought of as differentiated, there must be an *indifferentiated* state of divinity, *Indifferenz* as such, which must be considered as preceding all differentiation. Schelling calls this the *Urwesen* (the divine ‘primordial essence’). This primordial divinity is, in fact, already blissful—and for now, I will allow myself to provisionally speak of primordial divine bliss; as we will see, Schelling will explicitly call it ‘bliss’ at the beginning of the 1811 *Weltalter* (the manuscript of which, however, was already being written during Schelling’s time in Stuttgart).

If God’s differentiated essence already has the *form* of identity, the primordial *Ur-*essence is absolutely indistinct. If differentiation in God indexes the beginning of consciousness and reflection (96), the preceding stage can only be called ‘unconscious’ (*bewusstlos*). As such, it is ‘a state (or condition, *Zustand*) in which everything is still all-together without separation. Divine life [...] begins in this manner. It contains everything within itself; it is [this] endless plenitude not only of the like but of the completely unlike, in complete inseparation (*Ungeschiedenheit*). God is there only as a calm self-brooding (*ein stilles Sinnen über sich selbst*)¹⁰—without any externalization or revelation. This is the state we have called the indifference (*Gleichgültigkeit*) of potencies in God’ (94).

Such is for Schelling the zero potency, or what he sometimes calls *das Potenzlose*. Before potencies ‘are transformed into a chain or sequence, they lie in God in full indifference (*Indifferenz*) or indistinguishability’ (84).

Assuming the World

All further presentation of the system is a differentiation and potentiation of this primordial zero. But there is, in fact, *no transition* from the primordial essence to existence, the world, or the outside—or even to differentiation. ‘If,’ says Schelling, ‘these [primordial] principles were to persist in this indifference, neither God nor anything else could develop’ (108). The *Urwesen*, in its absolute indifference and indistinction, has absolutely no reason or desire to reveal itself or create anything. This absolute substance is, in a perfectly Spinozian fashion, nonprocessual—but also, in a non-Spinozian manner, nonproductive. In its *Gleichgültigkeit*, why would it even care to produce any differentiation? This is why, for the middle Schelling in contrast to Spinoza, existence *is* a problem,¹¹ and why it has to be *postulated* in order to think the

¹⁰ An expression encountered *verbatim* in the description of divine bliss at the beginning of the 1811 *Weltalter*, too (Schelling 1946, 17).

¹¹ Cf. Negri 1991, 45: for Spinoza, “existence is not a problem.”

possibility of development and revelation; and why the world needs to be postulated, too (and this is, I would suggest, one of the functions of the middle-Schellingian 'freedom') in order to express the fact of the world as well as of reason—and thus, in the more traditional German idealist terms, the fact of consciousness and reflection (grasped here as divine reflection, both as the emergence of consciousness in God and as God's revelation in something that is his opposite (*Gegensatz*), through which he becomes 'actual'). In this way, the transcendental appears too, for which the primordial essence has no need.

God needs to be brought down to earth from his primordial bliss; the world has, so to speak, to come and get him. It is from the standpoint of the possibility and actuality of development that Schelling pronounces that one needs to begin with, *at once*, an identity and a 'dualism' if one is to think transition and development (70–71; cf. 117–118). 'Every unity must,' he asserts, 'divide itself in two in order to reveal itself. Twoness must therefore be just as original as unity' (79). Without postulating the 'moment [in which] consciousness begins' in God—and thus the moment in which he 'excludes the unconscious from himself' as 'non-divine,' as 'that which is not *himself*' (96–98)—no world or process of creation is thinkable. 'In order to manifest itself, everything requires something that is not *itself sensu stricto*' (98). That is also why Schelling says at the outset of the *Seminars* that the system—as the 'system of the world'—can 'only be discovered' (68); it is premised on the existence of the world, not even whose possibility could be derived from the primordial divine essence. The 'will towards revelation' coincides with the fact of 'existence itself' (79).

At the same time, in order not to be contingent or dogmatic, and not to absolutize the world as it is in its facticity, the system must begin not from the standpoint of development, but from a totality that must be thought of as *preceding* development and *suspending* it in order, at the same time, to exhibit the principle through which, *once* existence has been postulated, its forms of organization can be displayed in their necessity. Unmediated *by* the world, this principle needs to be the principle of the world while preceding all mediation. This is why, too, the system 'can only be discovered as one that is already there in-itself' (before mediation)—but also 'in the divine understanding (*Verstand*)' (68), implying the duality of reflection, but in an immediate way. That is to say: the system in the *Stuttgart Seminars* enacts at once suspension and duality, as a suspension of duality—a duality premised on the fact of the world and structuring its development—and a suspension that transports us to the absolute standpoint or principle that must be thought of as preceding any differentiation, revelation, and not-yet. Twoness and oneness must be postulated together within an 'absolute identity of unity and opposition' (118), and suspended together at this zero point.

For Schelling, this principle is the principle of indifference, and throughout the *Seminars*, we can see how the logic of differentiation stands in tension with, and is ultimately overpowered by what may be called a logic of *indifferentiation* that runs through the entire development, suspending it at every step and reminding us that this is all, in fact, a revelation of indifference and totality.¹² This logic of indifferentiation will

¹² The logic of what I am here calling "indifferentiation" is inherited by the middle Schelling from his earlier "identity philosophy" (ca. 1801–1806), which is radical precisely by virtue of doing away with the "not-yet" and processuality. For the best account of the identity system, see Whistler 2013. In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling tries to combine indifference and processuality into *one* system-narrative, with interesting results (as this paper hopes to show).

also converge with the logic of bliss. What the operation of the system thus allows Schelling to do is to inscribe these two logics—differentiation and indifferentiation—into one narrative, in which the divine essence wants to reveal itself as the ‘active, actual essence’ also ‘outside itself,’ i.e., to manifest itself—but to manifest itself not as a duality, but as ‘absolute identity’ (76). For that purpose, it must first *create* an outside—which is famously grasped by Schelling in the Kabbalistic terms of the ‘contraction’ of divine essence (84–89), the divine *tzimtzum*. God contracts into a point, so that the function of this contraction is, precisely, to *make space for the not-yet* as the possibility of revelation, development, and productivity—and thus (natural and human) history—and then expands into this not-yet until the point becomes the full circle, in which the zero and the end-zero coincide. The operation of the system in Schelling is fundamentally an operation of beginning—as beginning with totality *as* suspension of the not-yet, which must be thought of as preceding all difference but which, at the same time, *assumes* the world as well as inscribes the world *into* the logic of totality in a real, actual way.

Nature’s Material Bliss

I will not here trace the logic of indifferentiation in its entirety. But as mentioned, it goes through the entire process of development and revelation—through real and ideal in all their gradations—from absolute identity to absolute identity, from zero to its highest, utopian intensification. This logic is, at the same time, that of *Auflösung* (‘resolution’ but also ‘dissolution’). Right at the outset of the *Stuttgart Seminars*, Schelling positions *Auflösung* as the ‘organic’ principle of the system—as ‘an *organic* unity of all things,’ coinciding with ‘the principle of absolute identity’ (68). Already from Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, we know that the organism is for him the ‘real indifference point’ in nature (Schelling 1857, 177)—and we will witness just how total and all-dissolving the same nature-philosophical principle will become by the end of the *Stuttgart Seminars*, so that by ‘organic’ Schelling does not mean here any sort of happy environmentalist utopia, but instead the general principle of resolving real and ideal into an actual, totalizing indifference. This principle can be violent, too. In the dynamic process of nature, for example—to turn for a moment to the earlier *Würzburg System*, since the *Stuttgart Seminars* follow in this respect a similar logic except in less detail—the highest ideal intensification of this principle is *fire*, characterized by Schelling as a furious, operative indifference, ‘that which dissolves (*das Auflösende*) all forms of dynamic life,’ a dissolution of form in which, at this stage, the logic of matter results—and also, in a way, an Enough to dynamism, a ‘principle that consumes (*verzehrt*) all difference [in matter],’ and thus the ‘fate’ (*Schicksal*) of the dynamic natural process (Schelling 1860, 368–370).

In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, we can also see how fire functions as that which consumes difference and productivity, as well as the ambiguous nature of fire as the principle of, at once, life and death:

The producing, or the copula, insofar as it is one with the product, is in effect nothing other than the inner life...., the soft, subdued life-flame which burns in every being (*Wesen*), even the seemingly dead... However, insofar as it is

opposed to and contradicts the product [i.e., no longer as productive], it is the consuming fire (*das verzehrende Feuer*). The element of fire is hostile (*feindselig*) towards the possessiveness (*Eigenheit*) or selfhood of things. (*SPV* 122)

We may compare this passage to an earlier one, where the principle of 'selfhood' (*Selbstheit*) or *Egoismus* in God is compared to 'a consuming fire, in which no creature could survive' (106). Fire is 'hostile towards selfhood' from the standpoint of things in their *Selbstheit*; but there is a *Selbstheit* to fire itself—a manifestation of the absolute, divine selfhood. In nature, fire effaces the *Selbstheit* of things; but in God, it is *Selbstheit* itself, as fire or anger (*Zorn*), that would erase the world if let loose, so it needs to be counterbalanced by divine love (*Liebe*). In God, anger is the ground of love: 'that which provides love with footing, ground, and continuance (*Halt, Grund und Bestand*)' (106)—and furthermore, from the standpoint of the primordial essence, anger and love are fundamentally indistinguishable. It is precisely this primordial indistinction that, in the 1811 *Weltalter*, will be explicitly called 'bliss,' and its violent, *verzehrende* nature laid bare.

The 1804 *Würzburg System*, too, theorizes this identity of fire with the primordial essence—called there *Ursubstanz* ('primordial substance')—and the fact that this identity is part of an entire logic of indifferenciation, not as a logic of emergence or dialectical interweaving, but as a repetition and intensification of the very principle of indifference, to the point of its becoming *obliterative*. It is a potentiation of matter towards 'the effacement of all potency or difference'—which, in a typical Schellingian move, coincides, in the material bliss of the burning fire, with 'the clear primordial substance itself,' suspending the relation of 'before' and 'after' by canceling out, from the standpoint of the absolute origin, the (re-)production of natural forms—and the very logic of development-as-emergence. 'Fire does not emerge (*entsteht nicht*), it is the clear primordial substance itself, co-eternal with matter, but here it consumes (*verzehrt*) – seeks to dissolve (*aufzulösen*) – the holy Vesta...' (the goddess of fertility, and thus of (re-)production).¹³ This logic of nonemergence runs, furthermore, throughout the logic of material ideality, manifesting itself, aside from fire, as light, sound, and heat (Schelling 1860, 368). The *Stuttgart Seminars* add to that, importantly, 'the soul' (*Seele*), so that this repetition and intensification of indifference extends to 'the organic [nature]' (*SPV* 132) and then all the way to the human *Seele* (and *Seligkeit*). A parallel thread of indifference runs through 'water' and 'oxygen,' also grasped by Schelling as manifestations of indifference—as the 'formless,' 'consuming,' 'active privation of difference' (Schelling 1860, 370). The indifference of nature manifests itself in many ways, and if anything, nature is not shy about its indifference. Water and fire, then, are the closest the inorganic nature approaches bliss.

The Soul's Bliss—or, (Non)operativity Without Relation

The image of water, and watery bliss, may thus be deceptively peaceful in Rousseau and Adorno, but not in Schelling. In the *Stuttgart Seminars*, however, even at the

¹³ Note the link, too, between *Substanz*, *Auflösung*, and *Verzehrung*, also important for the middle Schelling's concept of bliss.

beginning when talking about the primordial essence, Schelling is much more intent on emphasizing love over anger. That this blissful love is, however, not a love *for* the world—but a complete nonrelation to it—remains the case even when we move from the primordial, pre-worldly divine bliss to the human bliss at the apex of the ‘first potency’ in creation (i.e., in terms of how Schelling frames it in this text, the logic of ‘this, earthly life’; *SPV* 169).

For Schelling, the human stands at the center of natural creation as its highest point—‘the point of indifference between plants and the animal kingdom’ (131). Schelling advances here a tripartite anthropology—a division of the human psyche into three strata, or ‘principles.’ The lowest, unconscious, ‘dark principle’ in us is what he calls ‘temper’ (*Gemüth*), whose highest potency is ‘feeling.’ The second principle is ‘spirit (*Geist*) in the narrow sense’—the principle of ‘personality’ thanks to which the human is capable of good and evil. It is, for Schelling, *Geist* as deciding between good and evil—and not temper or the body—that is the source of ‘madness, error, and sin.’ Therefore, he adds polemically, it is wrong to assume, as is too commonly done, that spirit is the highest principle. ‘If there were no higher authority over and above spirit, ... there would be no practical difference between truth and error’ (157–158). This higher authority, and the third principle in us, is the soul. ‘The soul,’ says Schelling, ‘is the properly divine in the human, and therefore the impersonal’ (160).

‘As absolutely divine’ and ‘pure,’ he continues, ‘the soul has no gradation within itself’ (164–165). It can, however, adopt two different *modi operandi*. ‘The highest [life] of the soul is that it functions purely, unconditionally, and without any relation (*ohne alle Beziehung*).’ It is this simple, nonrelational subsistence in God that Schelling terms the soul’s ‘religion’—not, he adds, as a ‘science,’ but rather as ‘the inner and highest bliss of temper and spirit,’ as *innere Seligkeit* (168–169). In this perfect internal oneness of all potencies, the soul is exclusively focused on its purity, immersed completely in the ‘absolute divine love’ (169) in blissful indifference to the world, but also to its own non-blissful self or personhood (its own temper, spirit, and will). At this point, the logic of indifference has intensified towards the impersonal and the improper, associated with the divine—so that, furthermore, the soul becomes indifferent, ‘without any relation’ to anything, and, in that, blissful.

In this, highest state that can be reached ‘in earthly life’ (169), the soul thus immanently refuses all relation and production (there is here no opposition of principles, on which production is premised). At the same time—and this moment is crucial—once the soul has reached this state, it *can*, says Schelling, also enter into ‘various relations (*Beziehungen*) to what is subordinated to it’ while simultaneously *remaining* indifferent—an operativity ‘through which it becomes capable of a variety of expressions (or externalizations, *Äußerungen*).’ These expressions (of impersonality and higher indifference) are, for Schelling, art, philosophy, and morality. When the blissful soul, in its indifference, ‘relates itself ... to longing (*Sehnsucht*) and willfulness (*Eigenwille*),’ it ‘creates art’ as the real ‘interpenetration of ideal and real.’ The soul ‘can [also] relate itself to feeling and the understanding.’ In this manner, ‘science in its highest sense arises, namely that science which is immediately inspired by the soul – [i.e.,] philosophy.’ Finally, ‘the soul can relate itself to the will and desire’ in order to create, ‘not [merely] a single moral action,’ but the entire ‘moral disposition of the soul, or virtue (*Tugend*) in the highest sense, namely as *virtus*, as purity, excellence, and strength of will’ (164–166). We can recognize in this, again, a reconfiguration of the

Spinozian formula of the identity between bliss and virtue—except that virtue is identified here not with bliss in toto, but with the operativity of bliss within the will.

Such is, for Schelling, the logic of higher creativity—as an operativity that immanently refuses the logic of ‘worldly’ production—so that works of art, philosophy, and practical life (morality and virtue) are all constituted through externalizations of the soul’s blissful indifference that, however, functions as such without relation to them. ‘Where such a peak has been reached, there the temporal as well as all human subjectivity have been canceled out (*abgestreift*)’ (168). Virtue in particular is, for Schelling here, a direct, immediate expression of the soul’s atemporal divine state. ‘Let the [impersonal, blissful] soul act in you, or act through and through as a holy man’ (166)—that is, one who acts, as we know from the 1809 *Freedom Essay*, immediately out of the divine, out of ‘the highest resoluteness for what is right, without any choice (*ohne alle Wahl*)’ (Schelling 2011, 64). In this state, the soul is a totality, complete in itself, so that virtue, as the immediate expression of that totality, operates here without any deliberation or relation to any context. It is atemporal in the sense of being without relation to the world’s present temporality or regime of re-production, instead directly enacting ‘what is right.’ It does not negotiate or construe dialectical relationships with the world; it intervenes into the world. Morality is indifferent to the world as it is while being operative *in* it. This immanent refusal of choice signals a divine, blissful indifference; and just as divine love is for Schelling ‘grounded’ in divine anger, so too must be the love of the holy man. At the same time, Schelling points out, anger must be fully subordinated to love in God’s self-revelation, within the human soul too; but, again, this is love *as* indifference.¹⁴

To sum it up: in the *Stuttgart Seminars* bliss can have a relation to, and shape, virtue, but must be thought of as preceding it in pure indifference. Bliss is divine, granted, and it is divine love; but it is not *per se* moral virtue. Similarly, bliss functions as operative in art and philosophy but it is, *per se*, neither. Bliss is an immanent refusal of all relation that *can*, however, enter into relations or expressions while remaining, as such, pure nonrelation and unproductivity—indifferent to whatever it enters into a relationship with. It is a No that refuses, in the now, to be caught up in the world’s regime of temporality or production—a No that performs its own (‘divine’) blissfulness *in* the world in complete indifference to it. Indifference is crucial here because—to make a broader point—insofar as something is operative *for* the world to see or acknowledge, it

¹⁴ Love and anger are thus, we could say, modes of operativity of bliss, too, which as such—in its purity and indifference—cannot be characterized as any specific emotion. This is why Schelling omits practically any theorization of bliss in terms of pleasure, passion, joy, or happiness—except in terms of the kind of purity (such as the “pure joy,” *reine Frohheit*, at the beginning of the 1811 *Weltalter*) in which all difference between individual emotions is suspended and what results is pure serenity.

In this, Schelling is also a Spinozist. To quote Lilli Alanen’s questioning of Spinozian bliss: “But *where* are we [in bliss]? ... *Whose* self is it? ... Is this really something that a finite subject can attain? ... At the third level of knowledge, we are supposed to see things *sub specie aeternitatis*, from God’s perspective, that is, the perspective of the universe as a whole. But then do we not have to distance ourselves from these finite selves that remain entrapped in their temporal existence with their joys and sorrows, and which qua temporal remain inaccessible to true cognition? From the point of view of eternity, I surmise, there are no joys and sorrows” (Alanen 2012, 252–253). What is at stake here, I would argue, is the constitutive impossibility of Spinozian-Schellingian bliss *from the point of view of the world*—which is the standpoint of binary and *Gegenwirkung*, joy or sorrow. What thus, perhaps, troubles Alanen is, among other things, the positive inhumanity of bliss (as indifference or purity, but even more generally—as a No to any further possibilities, joys and sorrows, or concerns, worldly or personal).

is not blissful, precisely because it thereby acknowledges the world by referring, and deferring, to it. Instead, bliss simply does not care, and it is this carelessness that allows it to be so powerful, and powerfully operative.

Yet this is not mere or purely atemporal detachment: it is a logic inscribed by Schelling *into* the world itself as the logic of the absolute and indifference—the highest potentiation of ‘earthly life’—so that again, indifferenciation, and even pure indifference, forcefully undoes the narrative from within, pointing already towards the closure of the utopian circle—towards what Schelling will theorize as the fully explicated absolute identity. In this way, however, the ‘circle’ will prove to be not a circle in the usual sense, but an incessant suspension of the not-yet *by* totality and indifference, so that the beginning and the end point coincide at every step. By the time we reach the ‘absolute bliss,’ this suspension will have become absolute.

Not There Yet

But we are not there yet. At the same time, how *do* we get there? The logic of natural creation and earthly existence has culminated in the soul’s inner bliss. There is no further potentiation or intensification possible in this life. Having reached the state of bliss, there is nowhere further to go—except to die. ‘The transition [from the first] to the absolute second potency,’ the next step of God’s revelation, ‘or the spirit world (*Geisterwelt*) ... can only be accomplished through death’ (*SPV* 171). For Schelling, it is ‘physical death’ which necessarily divides good from evil. ‘The necessity of death is premised on two absolutely irreconcilable principles [i.e., good and evil], whose separation (*Scheidung*) is what death is.’ As a result, in death one ‘achieve[s] one’s true *Esse*’ (170), becoming either a good or an evil spirit, of whom the *Geisterwelt* is composed. The spirit world, to which Schelling devotes an entire section of the *Seminars*, is thus a supernatural world of angels and demons—and importantly, it is, too, a created world. However, this is creation (and further potentiation) as subordinated to the ideal and not real potency—an ideal, angelic creation. God creates, at once, the natural world *and* the spirit world (a twoness that is, however, *one* act of creation), to which the human transitions via death—a transition that Schelling terms the soul’s ‘essentialization’ (essentially a higher chemical process; 172).

Crucially for us, the spirit world, or life after death, has its own, higher state of bliss. In this state, says Schelling, ‘the human reaches the highest possible potency; [this] blissfulness is therefore *Innigkeit* of all potencies’ (177). All potencies are, in this angelic or, as Schelling calls it, ‘daemonic’ bliss, concentrated or essentialized into one—into a purer, otherworldly blissfulness. Angelic bliss does not merely cancel out the temporal; it transports one, in a way, *outside* time: ‘In this concentrated state... we contemplate past, present and future at once: past and future have as such disappeared, and we see what used to be and what is in the same light’ (175). This higher, *innige* (and not just *innere*) indifference of angelic bliss to time itself is also why earlier, near the beginning of the *Seminars*, Schelling calls this stage the ‘*Brennpunkt* (focus as well as burning point) of time’—note the reappearance of light and fire again, which signals that the thread of indifference has not been broken. Angelic bliss is an intensification of the soul’s thisworldly bliss at the essentialized, fiery focal point of all time, and a transition from time to eternity and to the end of the world as it is, which Schelling proceeds to consider after this.

But, again, we are not there yet. Let us briefly pause here, just as Schelling's narrative pauses and hesitates right before the end of the *Stuttgart Seminars*. The point where it slows down is that of the present—the present state of nature and the spirit world. What is it, asks Schelling, that prevents humankind from reaching, if not absolute bliss (premised on the full actualization of the divine in the world), then at least the universal angelic, *innige* bliss right now? It is here, I would say, that the not-yet intervenes most powerfully, *deferring* the coming of bliss. In this life, says Schelling, one's body (*Leib*)—this natural thing—is a 'mixture' (*Mischung*), and as such does not permit one 'to appear completely as one is,' that is, as either good or evil. The present, 'fallen' state of nature itself is the cause of this. The ultimate source of nature's corruption is the Fall, and thus the human; as a consequence, nature is, in its present state, itself a mixture, endlessly caught up in the opposition, *Gegenwirkung*, of the two principles, at once nature-philosophical and ethical: 'The human spirit is either good or evil. Nature alone is not decided (*nicht entschieden*). In fact, its present formation (*Gestalt*) seems to rely on the continual counter-activity of good and evil' (170; cf. 171 on 'the undecidedness of nature'). Nature is therefore ceaselessly productive in its negativity or 'fallenness,' always out of balance except momentarily, and unable to free itself of production.

'Nature and the spirit world must,' affirms Schelling, '*ultimately* be united (*verbunden*).' But this 'higher potency, that of the properly eternal and absolute life, is *still to arrive*' (182; emphasis mine). Prior to that, nature must become 'pure' and without mixture; the same division of principles that takes place in the spirit world (into good and evil) must occur in nature, too. It is only in this manner, in the unity of purified body and purified soul, that the highest actual bliss can be achieved: 'That is why,' says Schelling, 'the highest degree of bliss does not simply arrive after death; for that, the human requires his or her body'—but this body has to be pure, which, 'according to the present state of nature,' is impossible. 'The resurrection of the dead,' Schelling insists, 'is completely included into the system,' but the arrival of the third period of 'restoration' (*Wiederherstellung*) is 'impossible, until ... nature first completes this separation on its own' (182–185), without our interference. We must, urges Schelling, allow nature to unfold by itself, even if this process is going to take a very long time, while we wait, patiently, for future bliss (nature is 'slow,' much slower than spirit, observes Schelling).

Schelling may be invested in bliss, especially by this point where the end of the entire construction is, in narrative terms, so near, but he would not be Schelling if he did not insist on giving nature its due, too. This tension between nature and bliss is resolved, circumnavigated or, in fact, *exposed* by him by introducing the logic of sacrifice (*Opfer*), importantly not as a logic of bliss, indifferent to any sacrifice, but of the not-yet and temporal development—as tied to the process of natural *Gegenwirkung*, *Mischung*, and productivity in their tension with nonproductivity and bliss. 'The human is therefore,' writes Schelling, 'a sacrifice for nature, just as nature at first used to be a sacrifice for the human. The human must, [even] in his perfect existence (*Daseyn*), wait for nature's own perfect existence [to arrive].' We are the ones who corrupted nature, so now it is 'without guilt (*ohne Schuld*) subjected to the present condition' (182). In its not-yet, in making us 'sacrifice' our immediate bliss in order to wait for it to unfold 'on its own,' nature strikes back the only way it can, making us pay—if only by indefinitely delaying the coming of bliss—for the way we instrumentalized it before.

To reiterate: as such, bliss is immediate, but the world resists this immediacy, seeking to mediate it. Bliss is an immanent No to the world, but the world intercepts it, attempting its best to defer this No via the not-yet in order to reproduce itself as it is—for which, at the same time, the human only has itself to blame. Ultimately, however, bliss *will* come—the very framework of absolute identity into which Schelling inscribes this development cannot but overpower any not-yet. In the case of natural development, this overpowering is preceded by what is grasped by Schelling in terms of the future ‘crisis’ of nature, understood in quasi-medical terms: ‘Ultimately, the *crisis* (*Krisis*) of nature has to take place, through which its long illness will be resolved (*entschieden*). Every crisis is accompanied by an expulsion (ejection, *Ausstößung*),’ a cancelation of the productivity of illness. The natural world, with its not-yet, is aborted in this crisis (‘this crisis is the last of nature,’ the last we hear of nature, as it were), leading Schelling to call it nature’s ‘Last Judgment’ (182–183)—a temporal or, in a broad sense, historical, but also chemical, medical, even physicalist narrativization of the eschatological.

But, at the same time, an esthetic one. The Last Judgment, as crisis, is also, I would suggest, a *catharsis*, and Schelling clearly has this aspect in mind when he compares, just shortly before that, the spirit world to the world of poetry (and thus angelic to poetic bliss), the natural world to the plastic arts—and the world history, as occurring through the ‘mediation’ (*Mittleres*) of the human, to ‘visible drama.’ ‘History,’ remarks Schelling, ‘is to be regarded as a great tragedy, played on the stage of this world, for which, [however,] this world merely provides the boards (*die bloßen Bretter*)’ (178). It is, ultimately, *indifference* to the world as it is that reveals itself in history—and this is also in a way cathartic, as well as tragic and even cruel.

No Love for the World

In all these moments I have traced, we see that, again, absolute divine love does not really love the world.¹⁵ This seems, in fact, to be characteristic of the logic of love in the middle Schelling more generally. True love is indifferent to the world; and furthermore, if we consider difference as implying, among other things, the possibility of differentiation and choice, we may observe that love is ‘indifferent’ in that it does not differentiate. Love is not a matter of choice. There is a binary involved in love—in his novella *Clara*, Schelling speaks, romantically, of ‘related souls’ destined for each other—but the two function here as one, and the original condition of their being ‘related souls’ in the first place is their nondifference, the unity that their soul form in a love that, although human, is at the same time ‘divine and eternal.’ It is only ‘this completely external world’ that ‘separates’ the two related souls, and defers their unification, ‘by centuries, large distances, or by the intricacies of the world’ (Schelling 2002, 72). The path from self to self goes through the world, but the world cares not for true love; it has its own productivity to take care of, which depends exactly

¹⁵ This aspect is, I believe, constitutive of the logic of bliss more generally (as pure and immanent dissolution of, and indifference to, the world), no matter how much Schelling wants to tone it down by speaking of “love” all the time. In its indifference, bliss does not—and furthermore, *cannot*—differentiate between pure love and pure violence; both coincide, and not necessarily in the way that Schelling wants them to (i.e., so that violence is subordinated to love).

on those intricacies and not-yets that threaten the unity of love. Nor does this love, in its turn, care in the least for the world. Moreover, the only thing that would make possible the hypothetical scenario in which all 'related souls' actually became one, at once and fully, would be a total, immediate collapse of the world's distances and temporalities, and thus a complete dissolution of this, 'external,' human world.

In the end, at the end of the *Stuttgart Seminars*, this indifference is exactly what overpowers nature. In this way, bliss becomes *absolute*. 'The highest spiritual *Seligkeit* is, however, not yet absolute'; in absolute blissfulness, God must be reunited with nature and 'all potencies must be actually (*wirklich*) brought into one.' This is the 'third period,' in which everything will be indifferenced towards the highest, most actual, 'absolute identity.' Beginning with the universal resurrection and the 'entry of the spirit world into the actual,' this period will ultimately see evil restored, 'everything that used to be implicit (*implicite*) explicated (*explicite*),' God himself, in this absolute bliss, become one with the world and 'visibly-embodied' (*sichtbar-leiblich*), nature and man 'deified,' and everything 'delivered over to the Father' again in his—now fully actual—bliss; a veritable *apokatastasis panton*. 'Then,' says Schelling, 'God is actually All in All, and pantheism is true' ('Dann ist Gott wirklich Alles in Allem, der Pantheismus wahr'; 182–184).¹⁶ In this indifference of potencies become total and actual, all binaries now coincide in a way that refuses any relationality or productivity. The world as it is, with its oppositions and not-yets, cannot withstand the power of indifference and what Schelling calls divine love; cannot survive the power of the system—precisely because the world's not-yet is inscribed by Schelling into the logic of the totality qua suspension and indifference in a real, actual manner, which turns the entire narrative of the world into a narrative of all-encompassing indifferencing. The 'true pantheism' becomes a utopic Spinozism, not of nature, but of indifference, nonrelation, and nonproductivity; and the system itself becomes a *system of bliss*, or fully consumed by absolute *Seligkeit*.

In this way, the radical immanence of bliss has, by the end of the *Stuttgart Seminars*, revealed itself in its indifferent nonrelation to the world—premised, at the same time, on the fact of the world with its not-yet, which serves to expose this indifference as conflict, suspension, and even obliteration (a conflict indicative of a broader, political-theological tension between Christianity and immanence)—something that would not have been possible within the framework of Schelling's earlier, nonprocessual identity philosophy in the absence of development and negativity.¹⁷ What makes the Schelling

¹⁶ A formula in which Spinoza meets St. Paul, to the point of indistinction—but also a formula whose placement at the end of the narrative of indifferencing exposes the conflict between the two.

¹⁷ While a detailed comparison between Schelling's and Spinoza's concepts of bliss would be out of scope for this paper, it should be noted that it is in his identity philosophy that Schelling's bliss is the most straightforwardly Spinozian—precisely because during this period Schelling re-visions the world as nonprocessual and nonfinite, refusing development, history, and the not-yet. The main ways in which the logic and the significance of bliss differ in Schelling compared to Spinoza, have to do with how—both before and after the identity-philosophy period—the finite world gets configured in Schelling as a process of development, history, etc., and bliss as the state of immanence which *precedes* finitude but also *into* which the entire world eschatologically resolves. This is due to the fact that, outside his identity philosophy, Schelling wants to think both the absolute immanence of bliss and the finite world *in* its finitude (and thus its negativity and not-yetness)—and not just as the immanent expression of the absolute in a Spinozistic manner, the way identity philosophy thinks it (where it is "only what expresses the law of identity that is of interest to the philosopher," as Daniel Whistler formulates it; Whistler 2019).

of the *Stuttgart Seminars* so interesting is the way the introduction of both logics—the Pauline-Christian (but also secular-progressivist) not-yet and the Spinozian-pantheistic immanence—into *one* actual narrative of indifferentiation exposes, at once, the fundamental conflict between the two and the violence or cruelty of *both*.

The immanent No of bliss is indifferent to the world and whatever possibilities may lie concealed in it; indifferent to the not-yet and any ‘intricacies of the world.’ It suspends or even obliterates—enacts an uncaring, unrelating, totalizing violence against—the world of natural and human history. A violence that clashes with the world’s own cruelty—with the world as always not yet just, not yet moral, with promises of justice or fulfillment in the future only serving to forestall it in the now in order to reproduce the ‘natural’ status quo. To suspend this endless, tiring not-yet, the system-narrative must begin from a point that is not mediated by, and must be thought as preceding, the world’s regime of re-production and possibility—and is thus, in this Schellingian framework, indifferent vis-à-vis the world. But if and when this indifference becomes operative and actual *in* the world and history, it cannot but become obliterative of them. By itself, bliss is an eternal state, but when it encounters human history and time, it must simultaneously be preceding or outside time, yet to come, and always already-here, intervening into and undoing the world. It is this getting-out-of-sync of bliss in its encounter with temporality, as a result of Schelling’s inscription of both into one process of development, that this paper has attempted to trace.

Conclusion: Bliss and Sovereignty

All that is, I would argue, also not without consequences for Schelling’s later philosophy. In fact, the first ‘epoch’ of the 1811 *Weltalter*, ‘The Past,’ begins again with the ‘primordial essence,’ called here ‘divinity’ (*Gottheit*), ‘the primordially first (*uerste*) unconditional state of essence.’ This essence is contrasted by Schelling with ‘being’ (*Seyn*) in a way that at once follows the *Stuttgart Seminars* and subtly but crucially shifts the emphasis in order, it would seem, to acknowledge just how powerful, and even absolutely *sovereign*, bliss has become by the end of the *Seminars*. ‘How do we begin to describe this purity (unadulteratedness, *Lauterkeit*)?’, asks Schelling. It is, of course, indifference—an absolute *Gleichgültigkeit* coinciding with ‘absolute freedom,’ without a care for the world or revelation. It is—and Schelling proceeds to rely on mystical terms which he earlier used to describe bliss in other works—‘pure delight’ (*reine Frohheit*), ‘grace, love and simplicity,’ ‘serene joy’ (*gelassene Wonne*), *stille Innigkeit* (again) that ‘revels in not being’ (Schelling 1946, 15–16).

‘By what was this bliss, [then,] moved to go beyond itself?’, inquires Schelling before dismissing the question as absurd. ‘It is,’ he says in a way that directly evokes the nondevelopmental character of the *Urwesen* in the *Stuttgart Seminars*, ‘impossible for this unadulteratedness to ever go outside itself, impossible for it to separate anything from itself’ (17). ‘The unadulterated purest freedom,’ he asserts, is one that ‘wills nothing, that desires no thing (*Sache*), to which all things are equal (without distinction, *gleich*), and which is therefore unmoved by anything.’ (15) It is ‘without qualities’ and the most ‘sublime,’ and as such *above* being—in fact, above God himself (understood as absolute being). This is not God, it is the principle of pure, purely positive divinity: ‘It is not God... In the human, it is the true humanity, and in God the true divinity. ...

We have dared,' says Schelling, 'to posit this simplicity... above God' (16), as the 'wellspring' (*Quelle*) of purest water (note the metaphor of water again; we will encounter fire in a moment, too, both united within absolute bliss). It is 'affirmation' (*Bejahung*), affirmation as such, and thus affirmation of 'nothing' (*Nichts*) (15).

By contrast—in a move that further builds on the figure of expansive movement that has occupied Schelling since his early work, and which was in the *Seminars* identified with the expansion of God, as a point, into the not-yet—the logic of being is described by Schelling here as essentially an *imperial* and colonial logic, a logic of 'expansion' (*Ausbreiten*) and 'desire' (*Begierde*) characterized in terms of 'necessity,' 'revelation,' 'development,' 'progress,' 'externality' (ultimately the not-yet again). 'All being strives to reveal itself, and insofar towards development; everything that is carries within itself the sting of progress and self-expansion, of wanting to express its infinity' (14). 'Absolute freedom,' however, is absolute indifference—and it is in this that its sovereignty consists. This will be 'nothing' 'insofar as it neither desires to itself become effective (*wirkend*), nor requires any sort of actuality (*Wirklichkeit*)'; and, at the same time, it is 'all' 'because it is from it alone, as the eternal freedom, that all force (or power, *Kraft*) comes, because it has all things beneath it, has mastery over all (*alles beherrscht*) but has itself no master (*von keinem beherrscht wird*)' (15).

We may note how the political-theological, which has already been implicit throughout, now becomes explicit as Schelling adds: 'The king, a wise person said, is someone who hopes for nothing and is not afraid of anything.' The absolute identity is here reconfigured as sovereignty and omnipotence, the source of all *Kraft*. 'In different terms,' says Schelling, referring to his earlier works, 'we have previously expressed the highest as the true, absolute unity of subject and object, which is neither and yet the power of (or to) both (*die Kraft zu beiden*)' (16). As omnipotent, it is of course absolutely oblitative, too, precisely *as* purity—oblitative of all being. 'It is,' Schelling reiterates, 'not God, it is the sparkle of the inaccessible light in which God lives,' coinciding with darkness, depth and unconsciousness—again, at this zero point, all is indistinguished; all distinction is suspended here. It is 'the *consuming sharpness of purity* that ... consumes all being as in fire' (16–17). It is a sublime, nonproductive, blissful sovereignty without quality and without imperium; an omnipotent and, in its vast carelessness, all-consuming power of pure indifference and nonrelation, above being and above God. A pure affirmation that is thus, too, reconfigured as bliss—which thereby gains new life in Schelling's later philosophy.

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