

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

I do not at all expect to be judged according to prejudices and provisional remarks alone. Whoever seeks to listen to me, listens to the end. It could very well be that in this case he would find something completely different from what, commensurate with his existing and somewhat narrow opinions, he expected to find.

(II/3, 143)

THE SINGULARITY OF F. W. J. SCHELLING

We would all do well to heed the words of advice Schelling offers his Berlin audience in 1842. As anyone who has ever wrestled with his works can attest, doing justice to the philosophical complexity of this original thinker is a huge challenge. The first and most obvious hurdle in conveying his philosophical views is simply Schelling himself: a child prodigy whose scholarly career spanned more than sixty years, he was at the center of, and yet outlived, both Romanticism and German Idealism. Over these many decades, the prodigious scope of his writings covered a wide spectrum of interests that reached from the natural sciences of physics and chemistry, biology and medicine, to philological work on myth and the history of religions; from aesthetic theory and criticism, to the work for which he is best known—philosophy and theology. In each of these fields, his works sparked intense interest and even sharper debate and controversy. By the time he arrived in Berlin, in the very twilight of his career, all these works lay behind him. In addition, over the few decades preceding his belated yet triumphant assumption of Hegel's old position, Schelling had hardly published anything that would shed light on the ongoing development of his philosophical system. Yet, through at times almost stenographic notes of his lectures, various accounts of his new positive philosophy had made their way into the public arena, thereby providing material upon which all interested parties could base their opinions, be they accurate or, as Schelling terms it, "somewhat narrow" (II/3, 143).

As Schelling makes clear in the words cited above, expectation plays a crucial role in the shaping of such opinions. Supported by the *Vorverständnis* of our unavoidable prejudice, the very act of expectation itself assumes its object to be predictable in that our anticipation seems, as if by habit, to aim at forming an interpretation that will confirm and conform to past experience. In this way, the schema of continuity and its benefit of predictability absolve us from having to risk encountering what is unexpected and new. As he made clear very early in his career, Schelling finds such a monochromatic view of life, in which one longs for a predictable and risk-free world, unattractive on several levels, for not only does such a philosophy make “history a mere illusion,” but it condemns all of us to a life under the “law [of]...iron necessity,” an existence whose ultimate outcome, according to Schelling, can only be a life of complete and utter “boredom” (I/1, 472). This antipathy toward boredom expresses one of the defining characteristics of Schelling’s philosophical work, namely his contention that reason is incapable of exhaustively parsing the exuberant dynamic of existence. The “first impression [that this]...so highly contingent thing we call the world [makes on us]...can in no way be an impression of something that has emerged through the *necessity of reason*.”¹ That there is a world at all, and that this world has precisely this vibrant explosion of life in all of its ongoing differentiation, communicates to Schelling a truth of existence that precedes the application of reason’s web of order and necessity. “*In every respect*” he writes, “*the world looks much less than a product of pure reason*. It contains such a *preponderant* mass of that which is *not reason*, that one could almost say that what is rational is what is *accidental*.”² What is not accidental, what appears to Schelling as much more essential to life than reason and thinking, is desire and action. In the Berlin lectures, he repeatedly stresses this obvious yet all too frequently overlooked fact that since thinking is not action, logic cannot be the author of history. Rather, only those beings free to act enjoy a history; a fact demonstrated by “the acts and deeds of exceptional individuals,” which, for Schelling, are “something that cannot be comprehended through reason alone” (II/3, 143). Necessary but not sufficient, reason loses its power to explain when confronted with the freedom of existence that is revealed in the deeds of real individuals. Returning to the hermeneutical task at hand, taken on his own terms as a free and arguably exceptional individual, we cannot comprehend Schelling’s deeds, thoughts, and philosophy through reason alone. Something more is required, and a good starting place would be to call into question some preconceived notions about who Schelling was and what his philosophy means.

In the standard reading of nineteenth-century German philosophy, Schelling is associated with German Idealism, a school of thought that grew out of Kant’s work and sought to perfect the latter’s ‘critical idealism’ into an ‘absolute idealism’ capable of unifying all fields of knowing within one self-enclosed system of philosophy. As a stepping-stone from Fichte’s ‘subjective idealism’ to Hegel’s ‘objective idealism,’ in this reading the young Schelling

serves as an essential moment in the movement's efforts to create a complete science of reason whose final form would be as universally valid as its method would be necessary. As the story goes, it was only later, after Hegel had demonstrated the brutal elegance of such an absolute idealism, that Schelling broke with this school of thought and turned his efforts to unsuccessfully critiquing and repudiating the tenets of this former colleague. While this reading of Schelling lends itself to the quick dismissal his complex thoughts have traditionally enjoyed, it is just too simple an account to be true.

To begin with, far from ever having been an evangelist of an absolute philosophy and necessary method, Schelling had always insisted upon the irreducible plurality and open-ended nature of doing philosophy. For example, consider what he wrote in 1795, some forty-five years before his Berlin lectures, on the proper relation of a philosopher to his vocation:

Nothing upsets the philosophical mind more than when he hears that from now on all philosophy is supposed to lie caught in the shackles of one system. Never has he felt greater than when he sees before him the infinitude of knowledge. The entire dignity of his science consists in the fact that it will never be completed. In that moment in which he would believe to have completed his system, he would become unbearable to himself. He would, in that moment, cease to be a *creator*, and would instead descend to being an instrument of his creation. (I/1, 306)

The young Schelling provides us here with a succinct articulation of one of his most cherished core convictions, which remains constant throughout his career, an ethical conviction vis-à-vis the *dignity* of philosophy, which in defending its inexhaustible meaning is diametrically opposed to the dream of finality and completeness found in a Hegel or Kant (as, for example, when the latter writes of attaining with his critical idealism the same degree of certainty and unchanging completeness of Aristotle's logic and Newton's mechanics). Kant locates the dignity of philosophy in its power to transcend the unique contingencies of existence, which for Schelling constitute the very nature of both our existence as free individuals and the unlimited richness of knowledge. Dignity for Schelling derives in part from the manner and integrity with which we tackle this fact of our human existence. Since freedom is the alpha and omega of all philosophy for Schelling, the process of engaging in the creative enterprise of philosophy must be as unending and vigorous as life itself. Dignity demands we refuse the temptation to surrender our role as creator for the less risky role of imitator, dependent as it is on a doctrine or method of our own, or worse, of someone else's making. This demands we refuse the self-gratifying conceit of a settled knowledge, and instead respect the magnitude by which existence exceeds our capacity for comprehension. Contrary to what many

would have us think of Schelling and his role in the development of absolute idealism, he rejects all claims to a universally valid and perfected system of philosophy as nothing other than a product of vain delusions of grandeur:

What philosophy is as such cannot be answered immediately. If it were so easy to agree about a definite concept of philosophy, one would only need to analyze this concept to see oneself at once in possession of a philosophy of universal validity. The point is this: philosophy is not something with which our mind, without its own agency, is originally and by nature imbued. It is throughout a work of freedom. It is for each only what he has himself made it; and therefore the idea of a philosophy [is] only the result of philosophy itself; a universally valid philosophy, however, [is] a vainglorious figment of the imagination [*ein Hirngespinnst*]. (I/2 9)

The delusive claim to a universally valid philosophy is for Schelling the result of a particular type of *Geisteskrankheit* that compels a philosopher to find more reality in the reflected world of abstraction than in that of lived experience. A symptom of this particular type of intellectual disease manifests itself in the inhibited and restrictive mentality characteristic of the mythic consciousness, in which the creations of our mind are accorded a reality independent of our own. Once this projection becomes accepted as fact, one forgets that one's system is just that, namely one's *own* unique creation. Schelling speaks to this mythic pathology in his *Stuttgart Lectures* of 1810, when he notes that claiming one's own creation as universally valid is "most illiberal," if not downright "scholastic [*Schulsystem*]" (I/7, 421). Since philosophy is always a creative work of freedom, Schelling argues that "philosophical systems are simply the works of their creators," which, in an important sense, are really only comparable to "historical novels (for example, Leibniz's system)" (I/7, 421). Problems arise, of course, when the authors of such systems forget their own freedom as creators and mistake their creative narratives for works of nonfiction. And it is in this sense that, beginning in 1827, Schelling took to calling Hegel's system a fiction because the latter believed he had completed a system whose method and truth were universally valid by themselves.³ The inhibiting and restrictive effects this system imposes on thinking parallels the effect *myth* has on consciousness in that both rob consciousness of its freedom for self-determination (II/2, 123, n. 1). Hegel achieves this effect through a *logical animism* that conflates the animate with the inanimate, whereby the human agency of a "living, real subject" is projected onto the "necessary self-movement...of the logical concept" (I/10, 212). The resulting mythic thought is typified by what Lévi-Strauss calls "anonymous thinking"—thinking that is no longer animated by the conscious decisions of an individual but rather by an impersonal and transcendent force. In Schelling's critique of Hegel's fiction, anonymous

thinking is driven by the self-movement of the logical concept via its autonomous negation, which "operates in men's minds without their being aware of the fact."⁴ The outcome is that, as Schelling points out, the creator of such a fiction or myth "descends to being an instrument of his creation."

Schelling refused to sink to such a level, choosing instead to accept philosophy as an infinitely creative task whose dignity and worth are demonstrated through its capacity for further development and differentiation. This point returns us to Schelling's words of advice to his audience in Berlin in 1842: "[w]hoever seeks to listen to me, listens to the end" (II/3, 143). Schelling's demand to be heard "to the end" follows from his understanding of the organic nature of his philosophy, shaped as it is by the organic nature of existence. Ontologically, he conceives of 'being' as an ongoing process of creative development, which, as a continuous creation, entails the continued emergence of *new* forms of being. Incessantly freeing itself from its momentary limits, existence is sustained and driven onward by what Schelling calls the "exuberance of being." *Existēmi* (existence), understood etymologically as an *arising* or *standing out of*, is in this sense ecstatic in that it continuously stands out beyond any momentary equilibrium. In this process, the ontogeny of being survives only if it continuously engenders new growth in a process of becoming, whose stasis would mean its cessation, and therewith its death. This same organic dynamic informs Schelling's idea of human nature: our existence as individuals is a continuous process of self-differentiation, wherein the possibilities of the future project out of the static reality of the past and present (hope). As Schelling repeatedly emphasized, the "task" of life, education, and culture is "to free oneself from oneself."⁵ We exist as individuals only when we overcome ourselves, when our actions transcend past habits and thereby generate a richer and more differentiated self.

Applied to the task at hand, Schelling's philosophy in general, and these lectures in particular, must be approached as the record of a relentlessly original individual whose long life was dedicated to the continuous development of his philosophy. As fruitful as this positive suggestion for reading Schelling might be, it nonetheless sets for us a daunting challenge. As he told his students in Berlin, "the content of these lectures is just not suited to the format of a typical textbook: it does not consist of a series of finished propositions that can be put forth individually. Rather its results are generated in a continuous but thoroughly free and animated progression and movement" (II/3, 20). His lectures represent a progression and movement of thought which, in 1842 Berlin, only *began* with the introductory lectures translated here, and then continued for the next *year and a half* through the course of *three* consecutive semesters. Again, accepting his own terms, I am tempted to suggest that Schelling's work is just not suited to a standard academic treatment because these lectures do not constitute a discrete text designed to stand on its own.⁶ The problem is even more acute given the attenuated scope of a translator's introduction that limits any attempt to do justice to the full complexity of his

philosophy. While acknowledging these limitations, I nonetheless want to offer a few historical sketches and interpretive suggestions, which I hope will offer a productive opening for reading and appreciating Schelling's Berlin lectures on *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*.

EXPECTATIONS IN BERLIN

Hegel's brilliance dazzled Berlin, and like a supernova his death in 1831 left behind a black hole in the intellectual and cultural life of Prussia's capital. Immediate attempts to find a suitable replacement for his chair were doomed to failure. The only professors foolish enough to take on the challenge were orthodox Hegelians with a penchant more for confessing allegiance to their master's teachings than advancing any original philosophy of their own. Failing to find a suitable replacement among the followers of Hegel, all eyes turned towards Munich, where Schelling, Hegel's one-time friend and supporter, was busy upsetting the Bavarian ecclesial authorities with his unorthodox brand of philosophy. A contemporary wrote not long after Hegel's death, "[a]fter the choice for the new professor of Hegel's chair completely failed, all the world turned with fiery eyes toward the universally longed for Schelling."⁷ This universal longing for Schelling extended to the highest reaches of German society. As early as 1833 the philosophically inclined crown prince Friedrich Wilhelm IV wrote of calling Schelling, whom he considered the "*geistreichsten* man of the German fatherland," to Berlin to take over Prussia's most prominent position in philosophy.⁸ So when in 1841 death once again made Fichte's former chair vacant, the now King Wilhelm IV brought the reluctant Schelling to Berlin with an offer he could not refuse: guaranteed freedom from the royal censors, plus the highest salary ever offered to a university professor at that time.⁹ The sixty-five-year-old Schelling negotiated these terms directly with the king's ambassador to Munich, C. J. Bunsen, whose enthusiasm for Schelling almost drips off the words he used in his appointment letter, where he proclaims, for example, that Schelling "should not come as a common professor, but as the philosopher chosen by God and called to be the teacher of this age."¹⁰ These great expectations were shared by the King himself, who hoped that Schelling's philosophy would put an end to the "dragonseed of Hegelian Pantheism," and its "facile omniscience."¹¹

This brief account of the constellation of forces that brought Schelling to Berlin in 1841 raises several important issues. There is an obvious question that refuses to be ignored: given Schelling's ripe age of sixty-five, and the very important fact that he had not published a significant work of philosophy in over thirty years, why would so many expect so much from a thinker who, on the face of it, appeared to offer so little? If one accepts the credibility of this

question, one may well conclude that Schelling's appointment was the last gasp of conservative traditionalists fighting to turn back the clock to a time when philosophy believed more than it doubted. Kant's successful inversion of the balance of power between belief and reason had unleashed an unstoppable quest for knowledge that culminated in Hegel's reduction of faith to logic. Ever since Jacobi first introduced the specter of "nihilism" in 1790 to describe the debilitating results of converting philosophy's wisdom into epistemology's knowledge, the more traditional elements of German culture had fought to maintain the integrity of the religious beliefs that held their culture together.¹² The unresolved tensions that animated the battle between the "rationalists" and the "Pietists"—tensions that the then twenty-year-old Schelling himself had surveyed in his earlier *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*—were still at work forty-five years later and had, in fact, grown in their intensity. In this reading, the appointment of the aging Schelling was seen by the rationalists as an almost poignant act of desperation on the part of the old guard to fend off the inevitable dawning of a new age of reason. Once again, just as in the 1790s, it appeared as if there were only two possible choices: revolution or a reactionary conservatism. Although this reading jibes well with the most recent accounts of Schelling's appointment in Berlin, it fails to do justice to both the complexity of his actual position and the historical context surrounding what Karl Jaspers has described as the last great event of the German university, that actually engaged the interest of the educated public.¹³

Indeed, a closer examination of the historical record leads to a different question: if Schelling was so philosophically over the hill, why did so many care so much about his return to the center stage of philosophy? Could it be that there was good reason to expect that Schelling would finally correct the excesses of idealism as manifested in the Hegelians' panlogism, and therewith restore a sense of balance and purpose to philosophy's role within society?

After King Ludwig of Bavaria invited him to teach in Munich in 1826, Schelling began a new cycle of productivity equal in intensity to that of his youth. In these years, he feverishly sought to articulate and develop a more comprehensive philosophy that would address the demands of his day by drawing on the truths he found in his study of the world's mythic, religious, and philosophical traditions. The spirit of modern philosophy clearly tended toward formal, critical, and thus *negative* results, and it was precisely the force and vitality of the *positive* that Schelling believed had been sacrificed by his erstwhile collaborators Fichte and Hegel. Modernity's demand for quantifiable forms of knowledge called for the divorce of sensuous intuition from its reflective articulation in the universal concepts of the natural sciences; a divorce that abandoned the needs of the human spirit for an integrative meaning and purpose of existence. In Munich Schelling began to critique this negative tendency, arguing that philosophy devoid of anything positive can only be thetic, that is, a formal system of definitions.¹⁴ As an a priori science, it follows that

such a system ultimately proves to be one extensively developed *petitio principii*, since as a purely immanent science it can begin and end only with itself. Following from its definition as logic, such a science cannot begin with actual existence but must rather “withdraw into itself so as to presuppose nothing” (*WMV*, 80).

Word of the general contours of Schelling’s new work spread quickly after his inaugural lecture in Munich during the winter semester of 1827–28. With Schelling’s 1834 publication of a brief introduction to a work by Victor Cousin, in which he set forth his first public critique of Hegel, the stage had been set for the inevitable clash of Hegel’s defenders and Schelling’s supporters. The German literati, who were repulsed by the anemic abstractions of Hegel’s system and fed up with the “facile omniscience” of his disciples, had found their champion in Schelling, whom they now hoped would provide them with a real future for philosophy. As Karl Rosenkranz acknowledges in his *Letter to Pierre Leroux*, “the news that Schelling was coming to Berlin” had “delighted” him:

I looked forward to the fight that this occasion must cause. I rejoiced in quiet over what by all appearances would be the toughest test of the Hegelian system and its adherents. I reveled in the feeling of progress, which for philosophy must spring from this. I greeted this challenge as a phenomenon never before encountered in philosophy, where a philosopher should have the power to step beyond the circle of his creation and to grasp its consequences, which in the history of philosophy until now is without precedent.¹⁵

A report of Schelling’s appointment in a Parisian journal in 1841 informs us that “[t]he most famous German philosopher, and without a doubt the greatest living thinker, Schelling, has been called by the King of Prussia” to be professor at the University of Berlin. After detailing the difficulties Schelling was leaving behind in Munich, where his critiques of Catholic dogma had almost lead the Bavarian King to ban him from lecturing, the article continues with the following analysis of the obstacles he would encounter in his new northern home:

Schelling’s arrival in Berlin will expose him to other conflicts and, as one even now can predict, of a no less sensational type. Those who have spent but a little time with philosophy know how bad these days the relations are between Schelling and the Hegelian school. For one thing, in a small publication of 1834, Schelling spoke quite contemptuously about the person and fundamental thoughts of his great rival, and quite sharply about the hordes of his followers, which he dared to describe as feeble minded.

On the other hand, in Germany there is a new school of philosophers who support Schelling's new system, and claim that it surpasses Hegel. Now this is a matter that the Hegelians, of the *genus irritabile*, can in no way deal with. Not only do they not think of confessing themselves to be feeble minded, they rather contend that with Hegel philosophy is complete, since the formula which explains all things has been discovered, and one must now simply apply it. And if there are still feeble minds in the world, then they are those who have not yet grasped this, and deceive themselves about being able to surpass Hegel.¹⁶

This report's predications proved to be dead on target. Schelling's brief introduction to Cousin's work had taken direct aim at Hegel's system, and in so doing had shown the direction in which his philosophy had been evolving during his years of silence. After defending his claim to having introduced the groundbreaking idea of a dynamic historical process in his *Philosophy of Nature* (1799) and his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling proceeded in his Cousin introduction to criticize Hegel for having completely drained this dynamic process of its living, empirical reality. He writes of "[a] later arrival, who by nature seemed to be predestined to create a new Wolfian system for our age, who by instinct, as it were, swept away that which was empirical...[and]...in place of what was living and real...posited its opposite, the logical concept, to which through a strange fiction or hypostatization, he ascribed a similar sort of necessary self-movement" (I/10, 212).

Schelling makes clear that this "feeble minded" transcription of the natural self-movement of the living human subject to a subject construed as a logical concept was Hegel's own "astonishing invention" (I/10, 212). Like watching a runner attempting to sprint on ice, Schelling saw Hegel's efforts to derive nature as the result of a logical process to be almost comical, if it were not for the destructive consequences that followed from this "strangest fiction" (I/10, 212). As if compounding Hegel's obsession with order and method, his followers now demonstrated an almost fanatical zeal in their efforts to, in the words of Engels, "protect the grave of the great master from insult."¹⁷ Thus did the avowed critics of religion's dogmas prepare to attack Schelling with nothing other than a religious zeal, devoid of any awareness that the ferocity of their assaults was almost as effective as any government censor in quelling dissent from their party line. And the attack from the Young Hegelians was fierce, employing the rhetoric of brute force, as when an anonymous author claimed that Schelling "was beaten into the grave" by Hegel in 1807.¹⁸ In a strange twist of irony, their agenda was being advanced not by an appeal to reason, but through the use of the dogmatic rhetoric of ecclesial authority and the appeal to the immature ego's need to belong to a group. In the rather shrill words of Engels:

Our concern will be to pursue the course of his thoughts and to protect the grave of the great master from insult. We do not shy away from the fight. Nothing more desirable could happen to us than for a while to be the *ecclesia pressa*. Here the temperaments part ways. What is true remains preserved in the fire, what is untrue we gladly miss amongst our ranks. Our opponents must concede that never have so many youths thronged to our colors, and never has the thought that governs us been on our side so much as it is now. Thus do we wish to stand with confidence against our new enemy.¹⁹

Disregarding the more ideological dimensions of this philosophical “fight,” the Young Hegelians had serious reasons to suspect that Schelling’s appointment signaled the beginning of a conservative backlash, spearheaded by the king and the religious authorities, against their critique of religion which, for Marx at least, was the “presupposition of all critique.”²⁰ Just judging the book by its cover, the full title of Schelling’s lectures speaks of a *philosophy of revelation*, which strongly suggests some sort of philosophical return to a Christian orthodoxy, a suggestion reinforced by the resounding chorus of support for Schelling’s arrival in Berlin from theologians, who had recently come to feel like an endangered species in the face of Hegel’s deadly logical formulas. The party line from this camp saw Schelling’s positive philosophy as “the necessary corrective for the recent discovery of criticism, before which no book of the new testament is safe”; a criticism which they held to be responsible “for the barrenness” of their “entire theological science.”²¹ As hard as it may be for us to grasp now, when Marx and others spoke of critique, they were not talking about a mere academic matter of no concern to general society. On the contrary, in the then nonsecular Prussian state, the possibility of critiquing religion also meant the possibility of critiquing the very center of ideological power that held the state together. This is why the state had censors, and why Schelling insisted that he have unconditional freedom from such censors while lecturing and working in Berlin.

Schelling’s entire position vis-à-vis the government’s suppression of freedom of inquiry demonstrates how this thinker refused to be neatly subsumed under this or that category, be it political, theological, or philosophical. The Hegelians’ fears that Schelling’s arrival announced a clampdown on intellectual and political freedoms proved baseless; on the contrary, he actually helped convince the government to lift censorship of the main journal of the Young Hegelians, the *Halleschen Jahrbücher*—an action that complements Ruge’s conclusion, based on personal conversations with Schelling, that Schelling was “completely liberal” when it came to religion and politics. Moreover, this conclusion would have come as no surprise to Bavaria’s governing powers in Munich, whom Schelling openly defied in 1838 through his refusal to follow their ban against philosophy professors lecturing on theological issues.²²

Indeed, if Schelling was a vehicle for reactionary conservatives, why were his lectures such a problem for the conservative government in Munich? Could it be that he too was engaged in a critique that, in good Socratic fashion, called into question too many religious conventions, thereby upsetting the government's ministers in Munich? If we answer this question in the affirmative, we must then ask why theologians in Berlin were looking for help in combating criticism from a philosopher whose freedom of teaching had been threatened due to the government in Munich giving into Catholic protests who were against his philosophy of revelation. Even taking into consideration the very real differences between Catholic Bavaria and Protestant Prussia, a philosophy of revelation that cannot be taught in a university would not appear to be a philosophy that a conservative theologian would look to for help in combating secular critiques of religion.

This constellation of opposing factions looking to the same thinker with very different expectations speaks to the importance of Schelling's lectures in 1841 Berlin. The hopes placed on Schelling's shoulders were immense because they were animated and driven by spiritual crises partially unleashed by Hegel's conceptual dismemberment of the cultural enterprise that had previously sought to unite and integrate the opposing claims of philosophy and religion. Consider Hegel's most popular work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. The prevailing understanding of this work at this time was that it was a description of a victorious process, in which the rational concept achieves total control over every domain of human experience through its knowing subsumption of every possible predicate under its ever-expanding sphere of determination. Yet this victory of rational knowing over ignorance appeared to many to have been purchased at the price of the reality and essential importance of spiritual, of *geistige* experience.²³ The numinous power of the *mysterium tremendum*—the sensuous experience of the sacred that animates the soul of every spiritual person—plays no role in Hegel's logic. Indeed, it is not allowed to play a role because as the prototypical 'other' of conceptually mediated experience, the numinous is by definition not qualified to participate in the dialectical development of the absolute. In his lectures on the *Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel is quite clear about the asymmetrical relation between logic and faith: "One must know only what the essential category of thought is here. Faith is also knowledge, but an immediate knowledge. Thus the antithesis reduces to the abstract determinations of immediacy and mediation, which we have to refer to only in the logic where the categories of thought are considered according to their truth."²⁴ In Hegel's logic, a "truth" must always be mediated; that is, it must be a reflexive moment immanent to the self-explication of the concept.²⁵ There are simply no other possibilities for truth, epistemological or otherwise; the existentially very real alienation of faith and reason experienced by the "ordinary abstract understanding...vanishes in the speculative notion" of Hegel's logic.²⁶ Thus is the reality of the numinous castrated and folded into the necessary progression of Hegel's method. As even

the first pupils at his gymnasium would have known, for Hegel “[t]here can be but *one method* in all science, in all knowledge. Method is just the self-explaining concept—nothing else—and the concept is one only.”²⁷

The hubris of this position led many to draw damning comparisons between Hegel and Goethe’s *Faust*, pointing out how Hegel’s philosophy culminated in the very state of omniscience that Goethe decried. “It really appears to be the case,” Leroux wrote, that Hegel “presents himself as Faust, . . . the philosopher who in vain searches for wisdom,” yet is “capable of transforming himself into Mephistopheles, . . . so that after the completion of this strange operation he can say: see here, Faust has finally reached the solution to his problem.”²⁸ And although Goethe never commented directly on such a family resemblance between Hegel and the characters of his *Faust*, he did express his thoughts about Hegel’s reduction of *Naturphilosophie* to his *Logic*, finding it impossible “to say anything more monstrous” than Hegel’s “annihilation [of] the eternal reality of nature by means of a miserable sophistical joke.”²⁹

Yet what for Goethe was a monstrosity was for Hegel’s followers anything but a sophistical joke. On the contrary, deriving certainty from the strict application of their teacher’s method, they too arrived at the summit of perfected knowing, an Archimedean position from which they claimed to be able to see clearly the underdeveloped nature of the unenlightened regions of human existence that stretched out below them; an absolute standpoint from which the Young Hegelian believed he could critique every and all other human activities, particularly religion. Implicit in Marx’s contention, for example, that the critique of religion is the precondition of all criticism, lies his acknowledgment of the central role this practice plays in the life of humanity—a role which Marx fought furiously to destroy, and which others struggled just as hard to sustain.

Leroux perhaps spoke best for those who demanded more from philosophy than just destructive critiques when he wrote that “the dangers that now threaten philosophy” come not “from the direction of her natural enemies, the adherents to all the idolatries of the past, but from the direction of those who pose as philosophers, and who now unfortunately believe that philosophy has its goal in calling everything into doubt, and in not believing in anything.”³⁰ The unrealized vision of German Idealism’s quest for a unified and integrated philosophy capable of harmonizing the oppositional claims of reason and intellect, faith and the will, and of coordinating the prismatic claims made by these very different powers of our humanity, appeared threatened by Hegel’s monotone method of “grey upon grey,” wherein, with the triumph of epistemology over wisdom, of knowledge over faith, there was nothing more left to believe in.³¹

It was this nihilistic milieu that fed what Rausch called the “widespread longing for Schelling.” For many he was a giant of the golden age of German Hellenism, whose genius and wisdom gave them hope that perhaps he would

be the philosopher who would reunite and resuscitate what Hegel had so effectively separated and drained of life. The future force behind modern anarchism, the Russian philosopher Michail Bakunin, gives voice to such feelings when he writes to his family in the summer of 1841: "You cannot imagine with what impatience I have been waiting for Schelling's lectures. In the course of the summer I have read much of his works and found therein such an immeasurable profundity of life and creative thinking that I am convinced he will now reveal to us a treasure of meaning."³² Søren Kierkegaard was also among the ranks of those who saw in Schelling a sort of savior figure who would rescue their age from meaninglessness. He writes of the desire for a connection of philosophy with the real world, with the reality of our lived human experience; a connection he cannot find in a universal logic. There is a "sighing"—the metaphor of longing once again—a deep need and desire to have something real, not just an idea. And again, there is the extraordinary expectation projected onto the old Schelling:

I am so thrilled to have heard Schelling's second lecture—indescribable. Long enough have I sighed and the thoughts within me sighed; and then as he spoke the word "reality," and of the relationship of philosophy to reality, the fruit of those thoughts within me jumped for joy as if they were of Elizabeth. I remember almost every word he said from that moment onward. Maybe here clarity can occur.... I have now placed all my hope in Schelling.³³

What unites Bakunin and Kierkegaard is the longing for a philosophy that would once again offer the hope of a meaningful connection to reality and a creative future. Clearly, the intensity of these longings and hopes exceeds the anemic limits of pure reason, spilling over into the realm of existence and, most importantly, the sphere of the religious. Whereas Hegel and his school had consigned the religious *Vorstellung* (*representation*) to the hinterland of underdeveloped ideas, it was clear from its very title that Schelling's positive philosophy, with its subsidiary philosophies of mythology and revelation, incorporated into its field of investigation the entirety of all religions. Schelling's stated goal was to philosophically explicate the phenomena of religion without, however, castrating their numinous power. This reconciliation would then usher in a new era of productive peace between the perennially antagonistic camps of philosophy and theology. Finally, from the many written accounts of Schelling's Munich lectures, most of his audience in Berlin was aware that his positive philosophy culminated in the challenge of creating a new way of doing philosophy, which would lead to what he called a *philosophical religion*.

This challenge of moving beyond the past and into a new and different future appealed to a wide spectrum of the educated classes not only in Germany, but throughout Europe as well. In a review of Schelling's Berlin lectures in a French journal, Leroux emphasizes that Schelling's task is "above all to solve the problems which move the human spirit today."³⁴ Problems of the human spirit that Leroux believed could only be addressed if philosophy reinvigorates itself by integrating the creative power of the sacred:

[O]ne should realize that Schelling is not facing backwards. He has assembled himself in the phalanx of those great spirits who all with different formulations announce a *new religion*. I repeat: there will come a time in which there will not be one or more German or French philosophies, but rather there will be but one philosophy, that is at the same time a religion.³⁵

What was hoped for was the declaration of a new interpretive framework that, unlike Hegel's system, would not repress humanity's desire for meaning that transcends the present. Such a framework would offer the hope of a new and transformed future, while integrating this longing into a meaningful unity that encompasses all the varied dimensions of human existence. The intensity of the desire for some way of making meaning in a world rendered meaningless by reason's excesses speaks to the crises of the human spirit that Leroux and others clearly experienced, both personally and culturally. A crisis that Schelling himself acutely sensed. As he wrote in 1834, "German philosophy is still in the grips of a process" whose "explanatory crisis still lies ahead of it" (I/10, 223). The crises that he foresaw would occur only if philosophy proved itself incapable of countering the growing force of cultural nihilism; a possible future that could only be avoided if philosophy could somehow offer a viable system that promised a new redemptive paradigm.

To do this philosophy was going to have to offer up something more than a formal science of concepts, animated only by the sheer force of logical negation, and thus devoid of any positive meaning for humanity's existence. While a necessary element of any complete philosophical system, a formal system of concepts controlled by the necessary dictates of logic alone was incapable of doing justice to the contingencies and complexities of human experience. The Kantian ideal of completeness had to be redefined so that it would no longer refer to an idealized state of static immutability, devoid of all development. Completeness needed to be conceptualized as dynamic and processional, referring to a perfect state of ongoing and never ending development whose results would be as unpredictable as they were creative. Such a redefined conception of completeness was to be found in the system principle of freedom which animates all of Schelling's thinking. The challenge was to account systematically for

the reality of this freedom, particularly as it manifests itself in the generation of the new, whether this is in terms of the first creation from the past, the creation of the present, or of creations yet to be realized. If experience refuses to be reduced to the elegant necessities of mathematical expression; if the boredom of a perfected nature and final answers is not the ultimate goal of philosophizing; and if we are not to be forever doomed to advance while looking backward to the past, then it is imperative that philosophy develop new ways of articulating a more complex understanding of our reality. It is precisely this challenge that Leroux and others hoped Schelling would prove capable of meeting in his "existential system" (*PO*, 125).

AN EXISTENTIAL SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY

In the Berlin lectures on *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, Schelling claims that he has always worked within a system whose goal of completeness demands an ongoing struggle between two complementary methods, namely the negative or critical and the positive or dogmatic. "Convinced of this" he writes, "I maintained already in 1795, in the *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, that...in opposition to this criticism (and thus was the critical philosophy labeled as a system) there will someday appear an entirely different, far more adroit dogmatism than that of the mistaken and half-hearted former metaphysics" (II/3, 84).³⁶ Jacobi introduced this opposition in a debate about the scope and power of reason, which he cast in the form of a simplistic dilemma, wherein one is forced to choose between a "rational nihilism or irrational fideism."³⁷ Schelling argued against such a divisive approach in his *Philosophical Letters*, advocating the replacement of Jacobi's binary "either-or" with a complementary and more encompassing "both-and": philosophy can do justice to the dignity and richness of human existence only when it can integrate these opposing frameworks into one system. Although the negative enterprise of critique is needed to maintain philosophy's allegiance to truth, it often devolves into meaningless skepticism if it is incapable of dealing with existence and the world of human action in which our very freedom testifies to the contingent status of meaning in our lives—a contingent status that in turn requires some form of dogmatic belief system through which we can integrate the chaotic and fragmented regions of our existence into a meaningful whole. We can submit our individual judgment to the necessary dictates of logic in the sphere of abstract thinking and theory, but "the extralogical nature of existence rebels so decisively against this," that the attempt to "explain the world and...[our]...own existence as the mere logical consequence of some kind of original necessity" renders impossible any coherent account of the freedom through which we determine *for ourselves* what we are to believe in (II/3, 95).

Freedom, as always, is the driving force behind Schelling's positive philosophy. Reinterpreting Kant's division of philosophy into its theoretical and practical employment, Schelling's understanding of positive philosophy flows seamlessly from Kant's own demarcation of the sphere of practical philosophy made in the first *Critique*: "[b]y 'the practical' I mean everything that is possible through freedom."³⁸ Positive philosophy addresses the rebellious "extra-logical nature of existence" that refuses to conform completely to the order of necessity. At the same time, however, through his negative philosophy Schelling is also dedicated to mapping out the logical nature of existence that constitutes the legitimate sphere of necessity's influence and control. If philosophy is to remain a vital and relevant power both in the lives of individuals and society, it must be capable of accounting for how both of these forces work together. Due to our instinctual drive to create meaning, both the negative and positive philosophies are inescapable because they are required to create the oppositional tension that drives the continuous development of philosophy. Indeed, it was the skeptical insight of criticism itself that enabled Schelling to see "why these two systems must necessarily arise beside each other" (I/1 306). This necessity yields the possibility of a comprehensive philosophy that would not only account for the philosophizing subject's abstract thoughts and representations but would also address and integrate the positive reality of existence that supports and transcends the *cogito's* reflections.

The essential role that the actuality of existence [*Wirklichkeit*] plays within Schelling's work is one of the most important yet difficult aspects to grasp. Unfortunately, the complexity of Schelling's understanding of existence, caused in large part by his originality as a thinker, has led many to just ignore this fundamental dimension of his work and simply file his philosophy away under the catchall category of German Idealism. Although this is certainly an expedient strategy, it ignores the richness of his contributions and the rebellious role he played in this decisive chapter of philosophy's history. Given our current task, a brief look at some of these earlier ideas will help us to better appreciate the continuity of the arguments he advances in Berlin against the absolute idealism of Hegel's negative philosophy.

As discussed earlier, Schelling's opposition of criticism and dogmatism expresses a frustration with the limits placed on philosophy by Kant's transcendental doctrine of method, which, according to his "disciplined reason," is allowed to work only in the abstract world of the 'concept': "[p]hilosophical knowledge is rational knowledge from concepts" (A 713/B 742). Only the concept can satisfy Kant's demands for a philosophical knowledge that must be universal, necessary, and certain. Intuition, be it sensual or intellectual, is therefore an unacceptable source of philosophical knowledge, since according to Kant, intuition concerns itself with what is particular and contingent.

This expulsion of intuition unmoors philosophy from its roots in existence and nature, releasing it, as it were, to ascend into the intoxicating air of universality, from whose dizzying altitude the reality of the individual, and the

chaotic power of freedom and creativity, vanish. Filtering out such contingent impurities enables Kant's transcendental idealism to function like a sort of conceptual knowledge-machine, which, as the third *Critique* would have it, effectively demotes the sublime yet nonlinear order of our organic existence to the second-class status of the mere sensuous world. This world then, agreeing with traditional dual-plane constructs of a Plato or Augustine, is valued as less real than the conceptual cathedral of pure reason. Since Kant's epistemology is incapable of processing that which is simultaneously the cause and effect of itself, he accords the purpose-driven actions of organic life—and therewith freedom itself—a merely regulative status, to be dealt with only as if they were forces constitutive of our world. By dividing our world into the noumenal and phenomenal, Kant set us on a course that, due to its repression of the organic, guaranteed “the negative and the positive in philosophy had to separate,” with the former laying claim to dominance over the latter (II/3, 75).

In this reading, Kant's Copernican Revolution initiated the final chapter in modernity's disastrous efforts to elevate the order of the subject over the order of nature—a chapter that Schelling helped to compose in its early stages, leaving it to Hegel to complete. As he confesses in Berlin, “[i]n truth, I had attempted in this philosophy nothing other than the next possible thing after Kant, and was inwardly quite removed from accepting it—no one will be able to cite an assertion contrary to this—as the *whole* of philosophy in the sense in which this later occurred” in Hegel (II/3, 86). His remove from the inverted world of idealism is plain to all familiar with his *Naturphilosophie*—the unique philosophy that was the focal point of his first three books and to which he devoted much more time and energy than he spent on his short essays on transcendental idealism.³⁹

Of particular relevance is the vehement protest he voices in the *Naturphilosophie* against philosophers for whom the only reality is the reflected, and thus *inverted*, world of the concept. Writing in 1797 he puts the matter as follows: “[h]e who feels and knows nothing real within and beyond him, who in general only lives from concepts and plays with concepts, for whom his own existence itself is nothing other than a matter of thinking—how can such a person speak about reality (like the blind about colors)? (I/2, 215).⁴⁰ The grey upon grey monotone concepts are but schematic outlines of the world, lifeless and anonymous representations stripped of all vitality and color due to reflection's removal of intuition from the realm of philosophical knowledge. Echoing Hamann, Schelling sees in Kant's removal of intuition the emergence of a conceptual philosophy that makes reflection an end in itself rather than a means to an end (I/2, 14). As he argued in his *Magister*, reflection is a “necessary evil” of thinking itself that emerges in the genesis of knowledge and freedom.⁴¹ We become aware of this power of reflection in the moment of “alienation” [*Entzweiung*] in which we find ourselves in “contradiction with the world” (I/2, 13, 14). This split, this separation of self from world, denotes both “the beginning of reflection” and “the first step to philosophy,” since

without this alienation and separation “we would have no need to do philosophy” in the first place (I/2, 13, 14). But once engaged in reflection, the philosopher “separates what nature had always kept unified, separating object from intuition, concept from image,” and finally “himself from himself” (I/2, 13). In making “himself into an object,” however, “the *whole* person no longer acts,” because he has elevated one part of his being “in order to reflect on the others” (I/2, 13). Now an end in itself, this enthronement of reflection to a “position of control over the entire human” inevitably leads, on the psychological level, to the “intellectual sickness” of inaction due to overanalysis (I/2, 14). On the epistemological level, the exclusive reliance on reflection is a “divisive business,” which “makes permanent the separation between humanity and the world, in that it considers the world as a thing in itself, which neither intuition or imagination, nor understanding or reason, is capable of reaching (I/2, 14).

As an alternative to such a simplistic and anemic concept of philosophy, Schelling accepts reflection as a “necessary evil” that a “true philosophy” will always consider a “mere means” to an end. Therefore, reflection is nothing other than its “own destruction” via the overcoming of the very disjunct at the root of our separation and subsequent alienation” (I/2, 14). To accept reflection as such he must construct a genetic epistemology that will integrate sensual and intellectual intuition into Kant’s conceptual architectonic. What must be accounted for is the movement of the self from its original condition of wholeness to its more differentiated state of reflective activity. Schelling undertakes this challenge in the developmental history of self-consciousness advanced in his *Transcendental System of Idealism* (1800), wherein reflection arises in the self only after the more primary stage of “productive intuition”:

Since our whole philosophy proceeds from the standpoint of intuition, not that of reflection, occupied, for instance, by Kant and his philosophy, we shall also derive the now incipient series of acts [*Handlungen*] of the intelligence *as* acts, and not, say, as concepts of acts, or as categories. For how these acts attain reflection is the problem for a later epoch of self-consciousness. (I/3, 456)⁴²

In the second “epoch” of productive intuition, the self engages in the “unconscious act of producing” the “primary representations” of the object world of existence (ibid.). Roughly equivalent to Aristotle’s account in the *De Anima* of “the perception of proper objects” (428b21), Schelling here seeks to account for the self’s unerring apprehension of objects before the reflective assignment of concept *qua* predicate. It is this preconscious activity, operating at the limbic level of involuntary action, that forces us to perceive and represent the external world. The force of necessity that generates this conviction of an external object world is not only much stronger than thought, but it also serves

as the paradigm for the force of necessity itself, which accompanies the more tenuous connections of our logical judgments. This inversion of modernity's ordering of certainty places existence before representations, noting the undeniable fact that "we are just as insuperably and unshakably firm in our conviction of an existence beyond us—although this is communicated to us only through our representations—as we are of our own existence" (I/2 216). What makes our conviction so unshakable is that the sensuous intuition of the object world forms the very basis for the subsequent production of our concepts of these objects. Consequently, in Schelling's developmental epistemology, there is no dualistic gap that would require a correspondence theory of truth to bridge such a separation.

At this involuntary level of awareness, the unity of intuition and object is such that the act of intuiting and "the object are originally one" (I/3, 506). It is only in the next epoch of reflection that the result of this productive act—the concept—is differentiated from the generative act itself. This is an act of separation that Schelling considered the most elementary of judgments, and which is "designated very expressively through the word *Urtheil* [judgment], in that through this act what has thus far been inseparably united is now separated into concept and intuition" (I/3, 507).⁴³ Concepts arise for us in the separation of the act of producing from what is produced, "when we separate the acting as such from the outcome," which we then call "the concept" (I/3, 506).

Schelling provides us here with the process whereby the unconscious act of productive intuition serves as the generative ground of the resulting concept. The ordering of this developmental progression stands in stark contrast to what is seen from the standpoint of reflection, which, beginning with the divide between concept and intuition, must then account for how the two correspond to each other. A philosophy such as Kant's begins and works within the already formed world of the reflexive self. But this analytic starting point enters into the process too late, missing the beginning, the self coming to know itself. This fact undermines his account of how these transcendental concepts conform to the actual object world of existence. "A philosophy which starts from consciousness," Schelling writes, "will never be able to explain this conformity, nor is it explicable at all without an original identity" of the object and the concept, "whose principle necessarily lies beyond consciousness" (I/3, 506). Within Schelling's developmental monism this question does not even arise, "inasmuch as this question presupposes an original difference between the two" (I/3 506). Indeed, from this standpoint, the very fact that correspondence can occur on the abstract level of reflection indicates that concept and object must share the same structural identity on a more fundamental level. The horizontal picture of correspondence is just too static and one-dimensional to generate anything more than a circular argument of how the two relate. To provide a criterion whereby concept and intuition can be judged to agree or disagree we need a prior field of unity that transcends this duality. We need a vertical dimension, a genetic process of knowing, whose starting point

will provide us with the basis for explaining the necessity with which our concepts involuntarily match up with our intuitions of the external world. Schelling achieves this by his principle of the “original identity” of object and concept, which, because it is prior to the act of judgment, supplies the basis for adjudicating correspondence and agreement between different things. As he makes clear, this principle of the original identity “necessarily lies beyond consciousness.” This last point is critical. Under threat of circularity, the ground of consciousness cannot itself be consciousness, just as the ground of reason cannot itself be located within reason, and the ground of reflexivity cannot itself be accounted for in reflexive terms. The attempt of such an immanent grounding, as we will see, always proves circular and thus futile.⁴⁴

Schelling’s strategy of providing a transcendent grounding of thought in the unconscious limits of existence testifies to his conviction that philosophy must primarily deal with the actual world of human experience, a conviction which again sharply contrasts with the modality of possibility which determines Kant’s transcendental world of the “I think” (nowhere in the latter’s table of categories does actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] appear). For this to happen, Kant would have to begin his construction on a foundation beyond thinking, in that which is other than thinking, in that which in Schelling’s words is “immediately given” through the very thing Kant forbids philosophical knowledge, namely intuition. Following Fichte, Schelling’s paradigm of the “absolute certainty whereby all other certainty is mediated” is the proposition “I am” (I/3, 347, 343). Turning the Cartesian epistemology on its head, Schelling begins in the facts of existence and action, not of reflection and speculation. In this position the highest element in our knowing must be intuition, since only intuition provides us with unmediated certainty of the given actuality of our existence: “Nothing is for us actual, other than what, devoid of all mediation through concepts, devoid of all consciousness of freedom, is immediately given. But nothing gets to us immediately other than through intuition, and therefore intuition is the highest element in our knowledge” (I/2, 216). Radically empirical, the necessary force of certainty that delimits all philosophical activity ultimately derives from experience, namely, our actual existence. The undeniable constraints and limits which define our existence thus serve as the experiential paradigm for the necessity of a priori concepts, which, after the fact of experience, we then create through a process of abstraction (of separation in the sense of *Urtheil*) as we reflect backward upon what has already been.

Using the explanatory concept of the unconscious, Schelling expands the field of the empirical to cover both those experiences that we take notice of, as well as those that fall below the liminal level of conscious awareness. Seen from this standpoint, the apparent opposition between a priori and a posteriori knowledge disappears: