

# FREEDOM AND PLURALISM IN SCHELLING'S CRITIQUE OF FICHTE'S JENA WISSENSCHAFTSLEHRE

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*Abstract:* Our understanding of Schelling's internal critique of German idealism, including his late attack on Hegel, is incomplete unless we trace it to the early "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism," which initiate his engagement with the problem of systematicity—that judgment makes deriving a system of a priori conditions from a first principle necessary, while this capacity's finitude makes this impossible. Schelling aims to demonstrate this problem's intractability. My conceptual aim is to reconstruct this from the "Letters," which reject Fichte's claim that the *Wissenschaftslehre* is an unrivalled system. I read Schelling as charging Fichte with misrepresenting a system's livability or commensurability with our finitude. My historical aim is to provide a framework for understanding Schelling's *Freiheitsschrift*, which argues that a system's liveability depends on its incompleteness or limitation by our finitude. On my reading, Schelling is early and continually committed to systematicity within the bounds of human finitude.

Schelling tends to be either over-assimilated or under-assimilated with the highest ambitions of German idealism. A prominent reading sees him as an absolute idealist who successfully systematizes philosophy. An equally prominent reading sees his chief contribution as a skeptical attack on Hegelian systematicity. Both readings are incomplete: Schelling is *neither* simply a systematizer *nor* an anti-systematizer. On the one hand, he contributes to the idealist project from its inception, inspiring both Fichte's identification of critique with doctrine and Hegel's speculative reconception of critique. On the other hand, his view takes many turns, all of which concern how a system is even possible after Kant. In this, Schelling remains critical of the German idealist project. But his is an *internal* critique, one with a deep stake in the outcome.

I will argue that we cannot grasp Schelling's critique unless we trace it—earlier than most scholars do—to the "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" of 1795–1796. Written at the outset of his career, this text marks the beginning of Schelling's engagement with *the problem of systematicity*, namely, that our power of judgment makes the task of deriv-

ing a system of a priori conditions from a first principle necessary while that capacity's finitude makes this task impossible. Save for Schelling's identity philosophy, a phase that tempts scholars to peg him as an absolute idealist, his life-long critique of idealism seeks to articulate the intractability of this problem. My conceptual aim is to reconstruct this critique from Schelling's objection in the "Letters" to Fichte's view that the system of idealism or '*Wissenschaftslehre*' is unrivalled by Spinozism. I will interpret his objection as charging Fichte with misrepresenting what it is to *live* a system of philosophy, viz., what it is for one's system to be commensurate with one's finitude. In offering this interpretation, my *historical* aim will be to provide the context for understanding Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* or *Freiheitsschrift* of 1809, widely—though falsely—thought to constitute his initial attack on the idealist project.

In §1, I unpack the seed of Schelling's critique of Fichte from the "Anti-critique," a piece published at the time of the "Letters" in which he suggests the *Wissenschaftslehre* is incapable of refuting Spinozism. In §2, I reconstruct Schelling's argument for this from the "Letters," showing why he thinks the *Wissenschaftslehre* cannot exclude Spinozism. My reconstruction relies on the *form of systematicity*, my term for Schelling's criterion that the power of judgment must posit a first principle from which it must then derive a system. Under this criterion, judgment seeks what it cannot secure since it is a finite power—hence, the problem of systematicity. The form of systematicity, then, is a problematic form: it assigns a task we cannot complete. Schelling's insight is that a system's liveability depends on its incompleteness. A system can only be its susceptibility to the limitations of our finitude. In §3, I show this insight drives Schelling's claim in the *Freiheitsschrift* that a system's ground is contingent because it is human. My interpretation gives a more complex reading of Schelling than those that cast him as simply brazen or skeptical, presenting him as an internal critic of German idealism who is committed, despite vacillations, to *systematicity within the bounds of human finitude*.

### §1

Two major factors motivate Fichte's Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. First, Kant's claim that we know only appearances raises the skeptical threat that we cannot unify what we know and what there is. Second, Spinoza's claim that what we know and what there is, is grounded on purposeless substance raises the nihilistic threat that we lack the freedom to pursue ends—that purposive agency is incoherent. For the sake of unity, Fichte seeks a system grounded on a *first principle*; for the sake of freedom, he posits a principle of *purposiveness*. At the end of his tenure in Jena, he writes: "something stable, at rest, and dead can by no means enter the domain of what I call philosophy, within which all is act, movement and life."<sup>1</sup> For the dogmatist—Fichte's term for the Spinozist—beings are not self-moving, but persist unless they

are moved. But only what moves itself is alive. How, then, can the idealist maintain that all within the domain of philosophy is alive? It cannot be due to anything conditioned by substance on pain of nihilism. It must owe to something unconditioned, a principle with absolute explanatory primacy. Fichte calls this principle 'the I.'

In the 1797–1798 presentation of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte describes the I as "vital and active, something that generates cognitions out of itself and by means of itself." He instructs the idealist "to observe this activity . . . as a single, unified activity."<sup>2</sup> The idealist does not simply observe the activity of a finite self. Selves do not generate cognitions from themselves, free of relation to a world. This is why Fichte distinguishes the I from the self.<sup>3</sup> The former must explain the latter's possibility as a purposive being. In the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo*, he says the I "is to be understood as reason as such or in general, which is something quite different from personal I-hood."<sup>4</sup> The I is a general activity of self-movement—what Fichte elsewhere calls "life"<sup>5</sup>—of which I must find myself to be a particular instance. My task is to make my selfhood intelligible by apprehending the I as a principle of purposiveness.

I apprehend the I by reflecting on my capacity for freedom: I can think of the wall; I can also think of myself thinking the wall. When I do, "the thinking subject and the object of thought cannot be distinguished from each other in the way they could be while I was still thinking about the wall. . . . [W]hen I think about the I my activity is self-reverting. . . . [I]t consists in an act of intuiting."<sup>6</sup> In thinking myself thinking, my act of thought is its own object. It is not moved by something external, but is self-moving. Hence, my act of self-movement instantiates the general activity called 'I.' My act, which Fichte calls "intellectual intuition,"<sup>7</sup> cognizes the reality of my purposiveness. This is just to say that I cognize the reality of the *Wissenschaftslehre*'s first principle. In this, I practically refute the dogmatist—or, rather, I show how she practically refutes herself. She posits what Fichte calls 'the Not-I,' the principle of substantial persistence, which precludes the possibility of purposive agency. But she belies this principle *by her very capacity freely to posit it*. Her selfhood is ineliminable from her act of positing, which gives the lie to her system.

Schelling recapitulates Fichte's vindication of idealism over dogmatism in 1795's "Of the I as Principle of Philosophy." However, in a reply to a critical review of that work entitled "Anti-critique," Schelling begins to challenge the singularity of Fichte's system, a challenge on which he expands that year in the "Letters." He indicates a gap between *positing* and *grounding*—between asserting the explanatory primacy of a first principle and cognizing that principle's reality. If this gap exists, it is an open question whether idealism trumps dogmatism, for then positing the I will not consist in any definitive knowledge and so will not invalidate the dogmatist's positing of the Not-I.

First, Schelling denies we have the *authority* to restrict philosophy to the apprehension of certain principles over others, as this conflicts with human freedom.<sup>8</sup> He says the “question as to which (*abstract*) principle could furnish the starting point for philosophy . . . [is] unworthy of a free man who knows his own self,” who knows that “man was born to act, not to speculate, and that therefore his first step into philosophy must manifest the arrival of a free human being.”<sup>9</sup> Positing a first principle must be an unconditioned act, contingent on one’s capacity for freedom. Otherwise, it is a conditioned act, raising the threat of infinite conditions and, hence, of nihilism. Positing therefore cannot be restricted to idealist or dogmatic interests. This is why Schelling thinks it “ill-fated”<sup>10</sup> to decide which principle is first. He accordingly reads Fichte’s famous dictum—that one’s philosophy owes to the kind of person one is<sup>11</sup>—as many are misled to hear it in Fichte, namely, as stating sincerely that a person may in fact be an idealist or a dogmatist, owing to one’s preference.<sup>12</sup> If this is right, the *Wissenschaftslehre* is not unrivalled and hence not the sole system of philosophy.

Second, Schelling infers from the contingency of positing that such an act cannot cognize a system’s ground, but can only *postulate* one. Fichte himself calls positing a ‘postulate,’<sup>13</sup> but denies the dogmatist cognizes anything by postulating the Not-I. Schelling extends this charge to the idealist, calling the I “a mere *postulate*” because it “demands the same free action as that with which . . . all philosophizing must begin.” If positing is contingent on freedom, it no more offers a first principle than a *first act*. Indeed, Schelling says the “first postulate of all philosophy” is “to act freely.”<sup>14</sup> Positing thus proves the reality, not of an absolute ground, but of a decision of will that contrasts with rule-bound cognition. Whereas cognition follows specific rules, decision is a commitment to the framework of such rules and to that framework’s basic principles.<sup>15</sup> For Schelling, decision demonstrates, not the reality of an absolute ground, but one’s willingness to live by a principle. As he will say in the “Letters,” being an idealist or dogmatist “depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired. We must be what we call ourselves theoretically. And nothing can convince us of being that, except our very striving to be just that. This striving brings to pass our knowledge of ourselves, and thus this knowledge becomes the pure product of our freedom.”<sup>16</sup> I make my selfhood intelligible by striving to live in accordance with a system, not by vindicating that system over another. It is by expanding the concept of positing to include any first act, then, that Schelling begins to undermine the alleged reality of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.

Third, Schelling suggests that positing a first principle heralds an *endless* process of derivation. He says philosophy is “an idea whose realization the philosopher can expect alone from practical reason.” Coupled with his claim that an idea is a goal in Kant’s sense of an infinite task,<sup>17</sup> this amounts to the view that realizing the highest goal of philosophy—a system of a priori

conditions—is an infinite activity. On this view, one can never declare the matter settled as to which conditions are necessary for the possibility of experience. This should come as no surprise. If nothing more than a contingent decision authorizes one's endorsement of a first principle, deriving a system of conditions from that principle always labours under the question of whether a rival principle offers a better account of the possibility of experience. Hence, we can say that positing a first principle is *a contingency that incurs contingency*: just as positing lacks necessity, so too does the derived set of conditions at any given time. Of course, Fichte agrees that derivation poses an infinite task.<sup>18</sup> But he arrives at this view after affirming the singularity of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and the reality of its ground, both which Schelling calls into doubt.

I will now reconstruct Schelling's argument for these objections in the "Letters," focusing on his sympathy for philosophical pluralism while leaving aside his explicit rejection of intellectual intuition.<sup>19</sup> We will see that, at a metaphilosophical level, the "Letters" argue that emphasizing the difference between dogmatism and idealism is a red herring that obscures what they share in common, namely, the form of systematicity, a criterion that Schelling places on judgment and that he thinks admits of multiple instantiations.

## §2

In the Third Letter, Schelling interprets the basic question of the *Critique of Pure Reason*—how synthetic a priori judgments are possible—as asking how we “*come to egress from the absolute, and to progress toward an opposite*.”<sup>20</sup> He reads Kant's question as posing a *derivation* problem. If judgment as such rests on an “absolute” principle, then the problem of how synthetic a priori judgments are possible is a specification of this problem. Kant's question thus becomes the question of how such judgments, and the transcendental conditions they presuppose, emerge or “egress” from this principle. *Egression* is a relation between a first principle and the conditions derivable from it, a relation we demonstrate by striving to produce a system. It is in response to this derivation problem that, in the Fourth Letter, Schelling places a criterion on judgment. He says it must “*be preceded by an absolute unity*” and must “*terminate in an absolute . . . doctrine*.” This criterion yields what I will call the form of systematicity, which judgment must instantiate if it is to be systematic.

Two considerations lead Schelling to prescribe, on the one hand, the positing of a first principle or absolute unity and, on the other hand, the derivation of a system or absolute doctrine from that principle. First, he is convinced at this point in his career that positing an absolutely first principle is needed to avoid *Agrippan skepticism*, according to which judgment is vulnerable to circular, hypothetical or regressive justification.<sup>21</sup> One posits a first principle to dispel the justificatory skepticism that threatens judgment. Second, deriv-

ing a system of conditions is meant to avoid *empty formalism*, the problem whereby a principle lacks reality because it lacks the matter whose unity it is supposed to supply. One derives a system of conditions to supply the matter whose unity a first principle may provide. As Schelling puts it, the transition from an infinite principle to the finite conditions of the possibility of experience is “the problem of *all* philosophy, not only of one particular system.”<sup>22</sup> By deriving a system of conditions, one shows one’s principle is not an empty form, but constitutes a systematic order. Notice the two prescriptions that comprise Schelling’s criterion are mutually dependent: on pain of Agrippan skepticism, judgment and the conditions they presuppose require a first principle as its ground; on pain of empty formalism, that very principle requires a system of conditions as its constituted matter. The combined need to avoid skepticism and formalism fuse the two considerations into a single criterion.

The co-dependence of positing and deriving is an indication that to posit a first principle *just is* to derive a system of conditions from it. One cannot perform one without performing the other—hence the singularity of the form of systematicity.

This has an important implication for philosophical life. As a German idealist, Schelling believes philosophy is nothing if not systematic. It follows that the form of systematicity is the form of philosophical life. And since this form is neutral as regards idealism and dogmatism, such a life may be instantiated in more ways than one. This contradicts Fichte’s refutation of dogmatism. Echoing his denial of the singularity of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the “Anti-Critique,” Schelling ends the Sixth Letter thus: “if we want to establish a system and, therefore, principles, we cannot do it except by an anticipation of the practical decision. We should not establish those principles unless our freedom had already decided about them; at the beginning of our knowledge they are nothing but proleptic assertions, or . . . *original insuperable prejudices*.”<sup>23</sup> In his shorter piece, Schelling calls positing a first principle a free act whose proper form it is ill-fated to pursue. Here, he calls positing a “prejudice,” an act whose form *precedes judgment*—an act he will call the “unground” in the *Freiheitsschrift*.<sup>24</sup> Positing grounds judgment and thus cannot be determined in advance. The prejudicial nature of positing accordingly conforms to the above contrast between cognition and decision, a term Schelling uses here.

It is crucial to notice that recognizing our inability to predetermine the form positing must take forestalls nihilism, a threat we court if we deny that positing is a free act.<sup>25</sup> Despite his concern to avoid the consequences of dogmatism, Fichte unwittingly courts nihilism by placing an idealist constraint on the decision to posit a first principle.<sup>26</sup> He supersedes the insuperable on a misconstrual of what positing is. By contrast, Schelling recognizes that “[e]ither of the two absolutely opposed systems, dogmatism and idealism, is just as possible as the other.”<sup>27</sup> Their opposition is not a dispute we can finally

settle on pain of undermining the freedom by which one decides in the first place to pursue the construction of a system.

Schelling's pluralist inkling in the "Anti-Critique" is now full-fledged in the "Letters," solidifying his initial attack on Fichte's Jena *Wissenschaftslehre*. To posit a first principle is to instantiate the form of systematicity in an *unprethinkable way*. Accordingly, Schelling says it is "vain to believe that the victory is decided by the mere choice of principles which are to serve as a basis of one's system. . . . [A]s soon as we are in the contest, those very principles as set up in the beginning are no longer valid in and by themselves: now only is it to be decided, practically and by our freedom, whether they are valid or not."<sup>28</sup> In the "Anti-Critique," Schelling says the idea of a system denotes an infinite task that begins with a contingent decision and incurs the further contingency that defines the derived set of conditions at any given time. Here, he says such a decision is not a self-validating act, but is charged with generating its validity, namely, through the derivation of a system. A system's validity depends on the sustained effort to avert both Agrippan skepticism and empty formalism.

One consequence of the infinite task posed by systematicity is that pursuing a system's validity cannot consist in any final verdict on an opposing system. Indeed, one's project is only distinct so long as it has a problem in common with opposing projects. As Schelling says, "[n]o line of distinction could be drawn between different systems except in a field they had in common."<sup>29</sup> The field of dispute in which philosophers conduct their work is what he calls the realm of the "conditioned"—the realm of "problems."<sup>30</sup> It is, in a word, experience. It is the experience of a finite intellect that presents the dual threat of Agrippan skepticism and empty formalism and levels the double task of positing a first principle and deriving a system of conditions. Thus, it is only if we labour as finite intellects in a common space with other such intellects that the pursuit of systematicity can have any sense.<sup>31</sup> So long as this field exists, our labour will continue, to the vindication of neither side. Schelling elaborates on this point:

[One] who intends to close the dispute between the philosophers must proceed from the very point from which the dispute of philosophy itself proceeded, or, what amounts to the same thing, from the point from which the *original* conflict in the human mind proceeded. This point, however, is nothing but the *egress from the absolute*. For, if we had never left its sphere we should all agree about the absolute, and if we had never stepped out from it, we should have no other field for dispute.<sup>32</sup>

The dispute between idealism and dogmatism does not originate in the inability of one side to grasp the other's truth. It stems from the fact that either side is always already a partial view of the truth. If a system begins with a prejudicial act that must generate its validity, its disputability is not ultimately the result of incomprehension on the part of its proponent: it constitutes

what it means to strive for systematicity. It is because striving consists in our freedom to posit and derive that Schelling says the source of the dispute is “the human mind.” Such a mind labours under the form of systematicity in pursuit of a goal it can decide to pursue in idealist or dogmatic fashion. Sides to the dispute differ, then, not in their quarry, but in the “spirit” with which they lead the *same* “vocation.”<sup>33</sup> Despite their opposed attitudes, idealists and dogmatists share a *peculiar fate*.

My allusion to Kant is intentional. Schelling is committed to Kant’s distinction between a critique of philosophy’s form and the system in which philosophy would result.<sup>34</sup> He says: “[n]othing, it seems to me, proves more strikingly how little of the *spirit* of the *Critique of Pure Reason* the majority have grasped, than the almost universal belief that [it] belongs to one system alone, whereas it must be the very peculiarity of a critique of reason to favour *no* system exclusively, but instead to establish truly, or at least to prepare, a canon for *all* systems.”<sup>35</sup> Schelling’s assessment directly contradicts Fichte’s claim that critique is the sole property and guarantor of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, he explicitly states that Kant’s *Critique* is “the *genuine Wissenschaftslehre* because it is valid for *all knowledge*.”<sup>37</sup> Whereas Fichte unintentionally invites the threat of nihilism by excluding dogmatism from philosophy, Schelling is committed to the freedom of the “*actual* spirit in a *particular* system,”<sup>38</sup> a personal freedom we annul if we legislate how one must live out the philosophical vocation.<sup>39</sup>

Schelling’s pluralist account of systematicity in the “Letters” captures what it means for a finite intellect to live a system. It represents this project as one of striving, a “struggle” that displays the philosopher at the climax of “self-assertion.”<sup>40</sup> Fichte’s Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* fails to capture this struggle through a misconstrual of the act of positing. If we understand this act under the form of systematicity—a form free agents can instantiate in unprethinkable ways—we see that a continuous rivalry among opposed systems is constitutive of philosophical life. This is just an expression of the intractability of the problem of systematicity.

I turn now to my historical aim of using Schelling’s early critique to foreground the *Freiheitsschrift*. This text argues that a system’s ground is contingent because it is human, *viz.*, because it is none other than the *will*. We will see that this argument maintains Schelling’s endorsement of philosophical pluralism and extends his commitment to the intractability of the problem of systematicity.

### §3

The *Freiheitsschrift* is an investigation of our capacity for purposive agency. In this respect, it trades on Fichte’s original struggle against nihilism. But the text confronts a new problem that emerges from Fichte’s attempt to systematize transcendental idealism, namely, the inadvertent nihilism resulting from his



restriction on our capacity to posit philosophy's first principle. This problem raises the question of how freedom is *even compatible* with systematicity. According to Schelling, until we answer this question, we will be misled to believe that freedom is "completely incompatible with system, and [that] every philosophy making claim to unity and wholeness should end up with the denial of freedom."<sup>41</sup> He dispels this belief with an argument on the first page of the *Freiheitsschrift*:

Since no concept can be defined in isolation . . . and only proof of its connection with the whole also confers on it final scientific completeness, this must be preeminently the case with the concept of freedom, which, if it has reality at all, must not be simply a subordinate or subsidiary concept, but one of the system's ruling centre-points.<sup>42</sup>

The first premise states that a concept is only holistically definite, in contradistinction with other concepts in a system. According to this premise, a concept's maximal determinacy depends on every concept it is not. The second premise states that this applies to the concept of freedom. The final premise states that the concept of freedom must stand in a *grounding* relation to all other concepts in a system, not a subordinate one. Two implicit concerns drive this inference. First, the threat of Agrippan skepticism theoretically demands a basic concept or principle on which judgment escapes circular, hypothetical and regressive justification. As Schelling says, whether a system rises to "clarity in human understanding . . . depends on determination of the principle by which man comes to have knowledge of any kind."<sup>43</sup> Second, the threat of nihilism practically demands that positing this principle is a free act, lest human agency be annihilated by its subordination in a hierarchy of causal judgments. In this connection, Schelling maintains his pluralist position: "freedom is surely connected in some way with the world as a whole (regardless of whether it be thought in a realist or idealist manner)."<sup>44</sup> Given these concerns, then, he infers that freedom must serve as the principle on which a system rests. In other words, freedom is compatible with system *just if* it is its first principle.

Schelling's view is that a system in which freedom has any place is one that originates in a contingent act of positing. Indeed, since an exhaustive system must provide some place for the concept of freedom, *the only system possible* is one grounded on freedom.<sup>45</sup>

This argument reconciles freedom with systematicity, solving the problem arising from Fichte's misconception of positing through a pluralist reconception of the same. In this connection, Schelling remarks how "strange" it is that Fichte thinks the *Wissenschaftslehre* refutes "Spinozism (as Spinozism)," given that each is a "system of reason."<sup>46</sup> We saw that, *as Spinozism*, the dogmatist's system is just as contingent as the idealist's. Both are "systems of reason" just insofar as they are systems of freedom. As Schelling says, "making freedom the one and all of philosophy has set the human mind free

in general.”<sup>47</sup> It is not on behalf of any particular bent of mind, then, that the reconciliation argument enshrines freedom as the ground or “all” of philosophy. It is on behalf of the human mind “in general,” whose spontaneity the *Wissenschaftslehre* was meant to protect. Schelling’s continuing critique of this project extends his objections in the “Letters,” refining his core position that the very idea of a system presupposes the possibility of rival grounds, viz., of *rival freedoms*.

Schelling conceives of freedom in the *Freiheitsschrift* in terms of will, by which he intends the groundless striving for “unity and wholeness,” viz., for systematic understanding. He clarifies his conception through a potentially misleading distinction between God’s existence and the *ground* of God’s existence.<sup>48</sup> What is God such that it can be the consequent of anything? For Schelling, ‘God’ names, not the transcendent object of special metaphysics, but the immanent goal of general metaphysics, namely, a systematic understanding of being.<sup>49</sup> It denotes the absolute cognition with which philosophy cannot begin, but for which it must strive. “God’s existence” is therefore the consequent of the capacity for freedom in which all systems originate. Human freedom grounds God’s existence because it fuels the struggle for absolute cognition. Schelling calls this ground ‘will’ and claims that it

wants to give birth to God, that is, unfathomable unity, but in this respect there is not yet unity in the yearning itself. Hence, it is, considered for itself, also will; but will in which there is no understanding. . . . Nevertheless it is a will of the understanding, namely, yearning and desire for the latter. . . . After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground.<sup>50</sup>

The “Letters” enable us to interpret this suggestive passage. The will is “no understanding” insofar as it is prejudicial—a decision to cognize the world under a framework of rules. This is why Schelling says the will, qua ground, is anarchical. But the will is “of the understanding” insofar as its expression is judicial—a cognitive activity of judgment whereby we apply “rule, order and form” in experience. Thus, on the one hand, the freedom that grounds any possible system whatsoever is ungrounded will. In this sense, will bears the contingency of a *drive*, a contingency whose form cannot be prethinkable on pain of unwitting nihilism. On the other hand, insofar as freedom adopts the form of systematicity—that is, insofar as it elects to lead a philosophical life—it is a will that strives for systematic understanding. In this sense, will is, not merely a drive, but the *creative* drive that is expressed through philosophical construction. We saw that Schelling’s position in the “Letters” is to deny neither of these senses of will to the dogmatist. His position in the *Freiheitsschrift* is consistent with this. As he says: “freedom might still be derived even from Spinoza, not in a forced way, but rather easily and even more decisively.”<sup>51</sup>

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Initially inspired by Fichte's pioneering Jena project, Schelling *radicalizes* the role that freedom plays in the systematization of transcendental philosophy. This much is clear from his early critique of the *Wissenschaftslehre* in the "Letters." I hope to have shown why this text is essential for grasping Schelling's internal critique of German idealism, understood in terms of a philosophical system's liveability. I also hope to have contributed the context for understanding the *Freiheitsschrift's* argument that a system is nothing but its grounding in human freedom and, hence, its commensurability with the contingencies of human finitude. To the extent that the pluralist position animating this argument provides a foundation for Schelling's late attack on Hegel, its analysis serves to make sense of both his early foray into systematic philosophy and his mature criticisms of the same.

To conclude, it is worth relating Schelling's pluralist position to his overall philosophical trajectory. Its articulation straddles his identity philosophy, a phase during which freedom and finitude are systematically subordinated to God's infinite self-affirmation. This might tempt us to read this phase as a radical break from Schelling's commitment to philosophical pluralism. I would suggest interpreting it as a stage in a process of coming to terms with the insuperable limitations human finitude places on systematizing philosophy, a testament to his difficult yet dawning realization of the intractable problem that judgment incurs by striving for absolute knowledge.

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### Notes

1. Fichte 1964-, AP, I:381.
2. Fichte 1964-, VDML, I:454.
3. See Fichte 1964-, VDWL: "The word 'self' has frequently been employed of late to designate this same concept [as 'I']. If my derivation is correct, all the words in the family to which the word 'self' belongs (e.g., 'self-same,' 'the same,' etc.) signify a relationship to something that has already been posited, though only insofar as it has been posited through its mere concept. If what has been posited is I, then the word 'self' is formed. Hence the word 'self' presupposes the concept of the I, and everything that is thought to be absolute within the former is borrowed from the concept of the latter" (530n).
4. Fichte 1964-, WLN, IV/2:220.
5. Fichte 1987, BM, 111.
6. Fichte 1964-, WLN, IV/2:29.
7. Fichte 1964-, WLN, IV/2:31. He flatly asserts that intellectual intuition "produces no consciousness, not even self-consciousness. . . . I cannot take a single step, I cannot move my hand or foot, without the intellectual intuition of my self-consciousness

in these actions. It is only through such an intuition that I know that I do this" (I:459, 463). Rather than consisting in or producing self-consciousness, we might say intellectual intuition demonstrates one's *existential commitment* to oneself as a self-conscious self.

8. Compare Kant 1900–, KrV: "Reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings, and cannot restrict the freedom of critique through any prohibition without damaging itself and drawing upon itself a disadvantageous suspicion. Now there is nothing so important because of its utility, nothing so holy, that it may be exempted from this searching review and inspection, without regard for persons. The very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each of whom must be able to express his reservations, indeed even his veto, without holding back" (A738–739/B766–767).

9. Schelling 1856–1861, VIPP, I/1:242.

10. Schelling 1856–1861, VIPP, I/1:243.

11. Fichte 1964–, VDWL, I:434.

12. See Fichte 1964–, VDWL: "The object of idealism has an advantage . . . over that of dogmatism, for the former can be shown to be present within consciousness—not, to be sure, as the explanatory ground of experience, for this would be contradictory and would transform this system into a portion of experience; yet it can still be shown to be present, as such, within consciousness. In contrast, the object of dogmatism cannot be considered to be anything but a pure invention, which can be made into something real only by the success of this system" (I:429). The dogmatist's object is a fiction because the concept of thing-hood presupposes his conceptual framework, which implicates his subjectivity. The thing cannot be posited as the ground of experience without, *per impossibile*, annihilating the identity of the positing intellect. This is why the dogmatist has no legitimate object and hence *no philosophy*: he is not up to the task of grounding. But if one's philosophy depends on one's kind of person and dogmatism is no philosophy, one *cannot* be a dogmatic person, but at worst only a failed idealist. The dogmatist lives his freedom in *bad faith*.

13. See Fichte 1964–, WLN, IV/2:29.

14. Schelling 1856–1861, VIPP, I/1:243.

15. Compare Carnap 1988: 206–208.

16. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:308.

17. Schelling 1856–1861, VIPP, I/1:243.

18. Fichte 1964–, GW, I:261.

19. See Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK: "Intuition as such is usually explained as the most immediate experience; correctly, so far as it goes. Yet, the more immediate the experience, the closer to disappearance. Even sensuous intuition, as long as it is only what it is, borders on nothingness. Should I maintain it *as* intuition I would cease to be *I*; I must grasp myself with might in order to save myself from the abyss of intuition. Still, as long as intuition is intent upon objects, that is, as long as it is sensuous intuition, there is no danger of losing oneself. The I, on finding resistance, is *obliged* to take a stand against it, that is, to return into self. However, where sensuous intuition ceases, where everything objective vanishes, there is nothing but infinite expansion without a return into

self. Should I maintain intellectual intuition I would cease to live: I would go 'from time into eternity'" (I/1:325).

20. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:295. Compare VIPP: "the author of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in his attempt not only to arbitrate the dispute among philosophers but also to resolve the antinomy in philosophy itself, did not know what else to do than to state the point at issue in an all-encompassing question, which is expressed as follows: How are synthetic judgments a priori possible? As will be shown in the course of this investigation, this question in its highest abstraction is none other than: How is it possible for the absolute I to step out of itself and oppose to itself a not-I?" (I/1:175).

21. Schelling 1856–1861, VIPP, I/1:162.

22. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:314.

23. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:312–313.

24. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:407.

25. See Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK: "for a spirit who has made himself free and who owes *his* philosophy only to himself, nothing can be more unbearable than the despotism of narrow minds who cannot tolerate another system beside their own" (I/1:306).

26. See Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK: "Which of the two [systems] we choose depends on the freedom of spirit which we have ourselves acquired" (I/1:308). He may target Fichte when he says positing first principles "will not coerce our freedom to decide this way or that (that would be blind dogmaticism [*Dogmaticismus*])" (312). Compare GPP: "if someone did not want or intend to speak simply about philosophy in general, but to present *the* philosophy that *is*, and thus also endures, such a person would be the most inclined to let all previous developments have a just hearing, since they all must find their goal in the true philosophy. Such a person would feel the greatest reluctance to arouse the opinion that those attending his lectures should be prepared exclusively for some one system and should be intentionally left in ignorance about all the other standpoints that lie outside that position or should only be told of them in a partisan manner. Nothing could more enrage a youthful and fiery sensibility, burning for the truth, than the intention of a teacher to prepare his audience for some one special or particular system, wishing in this way to emasculate them by underhandedly removing the freedom of inquiry" (II/3:16).

27. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:307.

28. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:312. Compare Heidegger 1985: "The truth of a principle can in general never be demonstrated by success. For the *interpretation* of a success *as* a success is, after all, accomplished with the help of the presupposed but unfounded principle. . . . Thus, in relation to living nature what is decisive (and never yet seriously undertaken) is the essential project of life movement *as movement*" (138).

29. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:293.

30. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:308–309.

31. Compare James 1878: "The truth appears to be that every individual man may, if it please him, set up his private categorical imperative of what rightness or excellence in thought shall consist in, and these different ideals, instead of entering upon the scene armed with a warrant—whether derived from the polyp or from a transcendental source—appear only as so many brute affirmations left to fight it out upon the chess-board among

themselves. They are, at best, postulates, each of which must depend on the general consensus of experience as a whole to bear out its validity” (12–13).

32. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:293–294.

33. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:332.

34. See Kant 1900–, KrV: “this critique . . . is a treatise on the method [of metaphysics], not a system of the science itself; but it catalogues the entire outline of the science of metaphysics, both in respect of its boundaries and in respect of its entire internal structure” (Bxxii).

35. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:301. Schelling goes on to say the spirit of the *Critique* consists in deducing “the very possibility of two exactly opposed systems,” in establishing “a system of idealism as well as and in exact opposition to it, a system of dogmatism or realism” (I/1:302).

36. See Fichte 1964–, VDWL, for whom critique demands its own doctrine, and an idealistic one at that: “I know full well that Kant has by no means actually constructed a system. . . . Nevertheless, I am equally certain that Kant has entertained the thought of such a system, that all of the things he has actually presented are fragments and results of this system, and that his assertions make coherent sense only on this assumption. . . . [T]his worthy man will still retain the sole credit for having been the first person who consciously attempted to divert the attention of philosophy away from external objects and to direct it within ourselves. This is the spirit and the innermost soul of Kant’s entire philosophy, and it is also the spirit and soul of the *Wissenschaftslehre*” (478–479).

37. Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:304.

38. See Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:304.

39. Compare James 1878: “no law of the *cogitandum*, no norm-ative receipt for excellence in thinking, can be authoritatively promulgated. The only formal canon that we can apply to mind which is unassailable is the barren truism that it must think rightly” (16).

40. See Schelling 1856–1861, PBDK, I/1:284.

41. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:336.

42. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:336.

43. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:337, italics mine.

44. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:337.

45. See Heidegger 1985: “The concept of freedom is not only one concept among others which somehow has its place in the system, too. Rather, if it has any reality at all, it is the dominant central point of the system. ‘If it has any reality at all’—What does that mean: a concept has reality? This manner of speaking goes back to Kant. *Realitas* is that which constitutes the *res*, the thing in what it is, the thingness of a thing, its nature. ‘A concept has reality’ means: what is represented and intended in the concept is not just thought up, but is grounded in the nature of the thing itself, it constitutes the latter” (20–21).

46. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:350n.

47. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:352.

48. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWMF, I/7:358.

49. See Schelling 1856–1861, PUWWMF, I/7:340.  
 50. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWWMF, I/7:359–360.  
 51. Schelling 1856–1861, PUWWMF, I/7:346.

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